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Volume 54, Number 1, Fall 2000

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Film Quarterly

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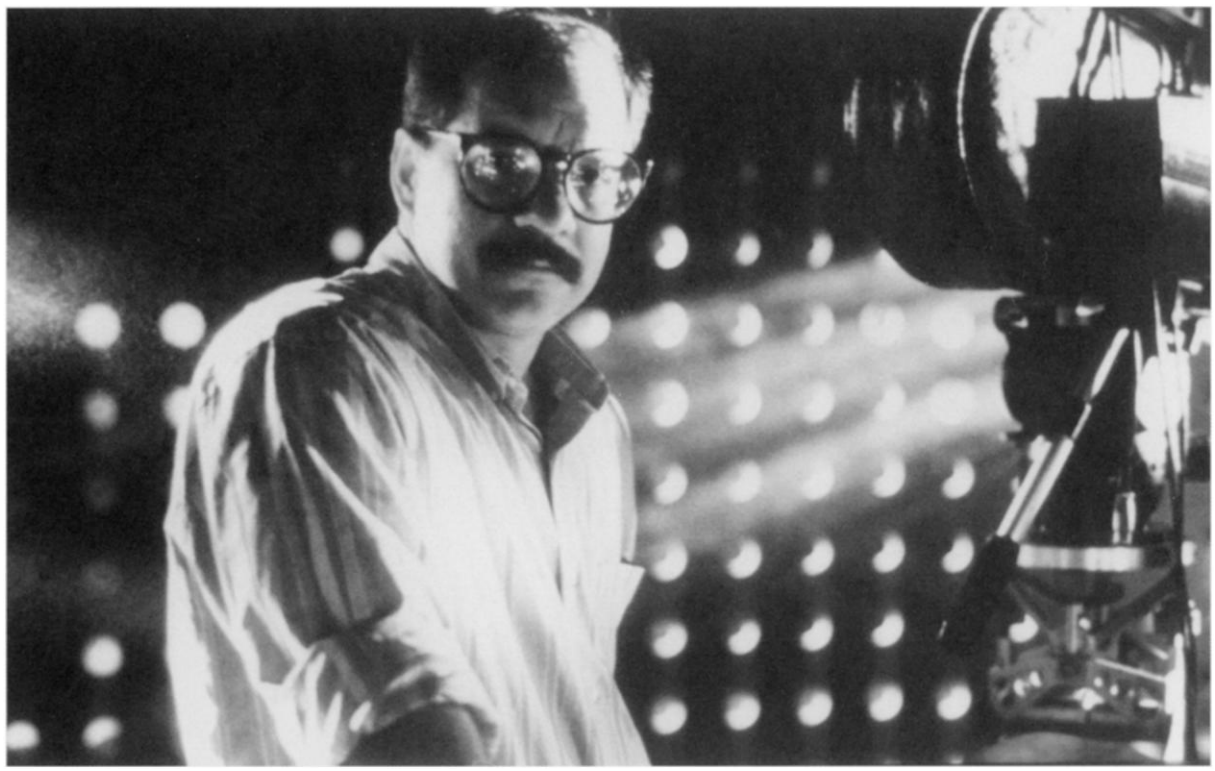
Michael Bliss

Affliction and Forgiveness



In a process akin to the one that he describes in his book on Ozu, Bresson, and Dreyer, Paul Schrader has managed to rise above the mundane. At 22, Schrader wrote the breakthrough book of film criticism *Transcendental Cinema,* which went beyond the realm of auteurist critique or philosophical study by under-emphasizing the first approach, embracing the second, and leavening everything with the point of view of someone whose background was deeply religious. Brought up Calvinist, Schrader early on cleaved to the notions that his family taught him, among them predestination and the view that the Bible was the word of God. At the same time, though, his restless intelligence led him down secular paths, toward film appreciation and aesthetics, two realms that clashed with the unquestioning acceptance of doctrine toward which he had been encouraged.

Schrader emerged a conflicted individual, a strain that one can find in evidence throughout *Transcendental Cinema*. The book reads as though it were written by someone who, like Martin La Salle's Michel in Bresson's film *Pickpocket* (1959), is undergoing conversion. Indeed, the incisiveness of the book's criticism makes it clear that by the time of its writing, Schrader had substituted film for Calvinism as his obsession. What Schrader perceived in Ozu's, Bresson's, and Dreyer's films was the directors' representation of the divine via a focus on the empirical. This focus was profound, intense, devotional, and completely uncompromised, characteristics that were endemic to Schrader's personality at the time and have been typical of him since.

Schrader took the Western urge toward repentance and the Eastern urge toward honorable revenge and blended them in his first produced screenplay, *The Yakuza* (1974). That the resultant film (which was directed by Sydney Pollack) softened the clarity of the script's vision taught Schrader a valuable lesson: to maintain more control over his material, either by working with sympathetic directors (as was the case with

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An Interview with Paul Schrader

1975's *Taxi Driver,* which Martin Scorsese shot virtually verbatim from Schrader's script) or by becoming a director himself.

The gritty, working-class milieu of Schrader's first film, *Blue Collar* (1977), carried over to a more personal work, 1978's *Hardcore*. Its story about a strait-laced Calvinist businessman (from Schrader's home town of Grand Rapids, Michigan) who goes underground in the neon sleaze world of porn and snuff films to bring out his supposedly abducted daughter was not only an homage to John Ford's *The Searchers* but also an incisive questioning of Schrader's own background. The film's protagonist, Jake Van Dorn (George C. Scott), is like one of Flannery O'Connor's evangelists—spiritually obsessed but blind to his own shortcomings, most of which are intrinsically linked to his religion. Jake is also an isolated man. The theme of what Schrader describes as "lonely men and their rooms" would appear, as it had in *Taxi Driver,* in his films *American Gigolo* (1979) and *Light Sleeper* (1991), and can also be seen in films that he scripted for other directors, such as Brian De Palma's *Obsession* (1976).

Schrader's collaborations with Scorsese—he wrote the scripts for *Raging Bull* (1980, co-authored with Mardik Martin), *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), and *Bringing Out the Dead* (1999)—represent a rare blend of complementary talents. In Scorsese, Schrader found a director whose religious intensity matched his own. In Schrader, Scorsese found the intellectual rigor that most of his early films' scripts had lacked.

It was with *Mishima* (1985), however, that Schrader transcended even himself, capturing the intensity of Mishima Yukio's novels, their blend of self-indulgent posturing with a fanatical drive toward purification, in a four-part cinematic meditation on the notion of what the director refers to as "suicidal glory." Mishima's *seppuku*, rendered by Schrader as the ultimate consequence of the writer's obsession with beauty and its unattainabilty, was, arguably, Mishima's greatest moment. We leave Travis at the end of the Scorsese film's shoot-out with a mock gun pointed at his head; in Schrader's film, Mishima in his death becomes himself.

Schrader considers *Taxi Driver* to be Part One of a planned cinematic tetralogy, within which *American Gigolo* is Part Two. In *Gigolo,* Schrader takes Travis Bickle's brand of forlorn lovelessness into the realm of high-priced whoredom. Whoring of a different kind is present in the tetralogy's third part, *Light Sleeper*, which centers on Willem Dafoe's John Le Tour, a reformed drug user who has turned to drug dealing. Schrader's insistence on apocalypse and redemption

Above: George C. Scott (center) in *Hardcore*
Facing page: Writer/director Paul Schrader

makes us see that the entirety of *American Gigolo*'s and *Light Sleeper*'s action is a journey toward a savior of souls, who is recognized in a moment of deeply religious grace. In his recent film *Affliction* (1997), Schrader presents a terrifying story of misperception and pain. *Affliction*'s lack of the usual Schrader redemptive ending tells us a great deal about its director's honesty, while Schrader's script for *Bringing Out the Dead* turns the nightmare realm of Scorsese's mean streets into a wild ride that culminates in ultimate forgiveness.

A few hours before a screening of his newest film, *Forever Mine,* I spoke to Schrader in his New York office.

MICHAEL BLISS: *You stated in a* Film Comment *interview that after you began to direct films, you lost all desire to be a critic. Is that still true?*
PAUL SCHRADER: I don't think that's exactly what I said. I still think like a critic, and I still analyze films like a critic. However, it's not possible to write criticism if you're making films.

Because of the time constraints, or some sort of philosophical contradiction?
No, because one makes films by virtue of the kindness and good graces of fellow artists. When you start criticizing, you start offending, and no matter what you say about someone, it's never good enough. In a matter of two or three months of writing reviews you could burn all of your bridges, so you just don't go there. I've often been tempted to go back to criticism, but I know that I can't. I have some pretty strong opinions about people whom I've worked with and people whose work I know, and those opinions are best kept to myself.

Yet you didn't keep those opinions to yourself when you talked about how your script Déjà Vu *was metamorphosed into De Palma's film* Obsession. *You seemed to be criticizing the process of a writer's collaborating with a director when you said that when you work with a director, the script's ideas become the director's.*
Well, I didn't like the way that Brian cast the movie, and I didn't like the way that he changed the script. But at least he was an interesting director at the time.

At the time?
Yes. I talked to him after *Mission Impossible*. He said that he was going to go back and make a personal film, and I said, Do you really think that you can do that, do you really think you can resist the temptation of money, and he said, Yes, I can do that.

But shouldn't you be able to do that after a certain point of success, to do a project for love, not money?
Of course, but it's terrifying, because first of all you get addicted to reputation, to certain perks, a certain lifestyle. You have big overhead, you're a big boy in a big game. You make big movies for big audiences. You don't have a little office like mine in Times Square; you have a huge suite of offices at the Paramount lot, and you have 15 people working for you. By contrast, take this script I just finished, the fourth installment in what I envision as a tetralogy, starting with *Taxi Driver,* going on to *American Gigolo, Light Sleeper,* and now this one, called *The Walker*. I wrote it in such a way that I could make this film for about 5 million dollars if I had to, and I will if I have to. In this film, the character who was driving in *Taxi Driver* has now ended up in the cab's back seat. The gigolo has become a walker in his fifties.

What's a walker?
A walker is usually a relatively well-to-do, highly cultivated man who escorts rich women to functions. The whole premise behind the character is someone who drifts around, often at night, peeking into other people's worlds because he doesn't have a life of his own. He wants a life, but he can't figure out how to get one. And as he ages, he has different life concerns. He goes from anger to narcissism to anxiety to someone who has made it his life's vocation to be deeply superficial. Eventually, my walker is thrown into a situation in which he has to decide just how superficial he is.

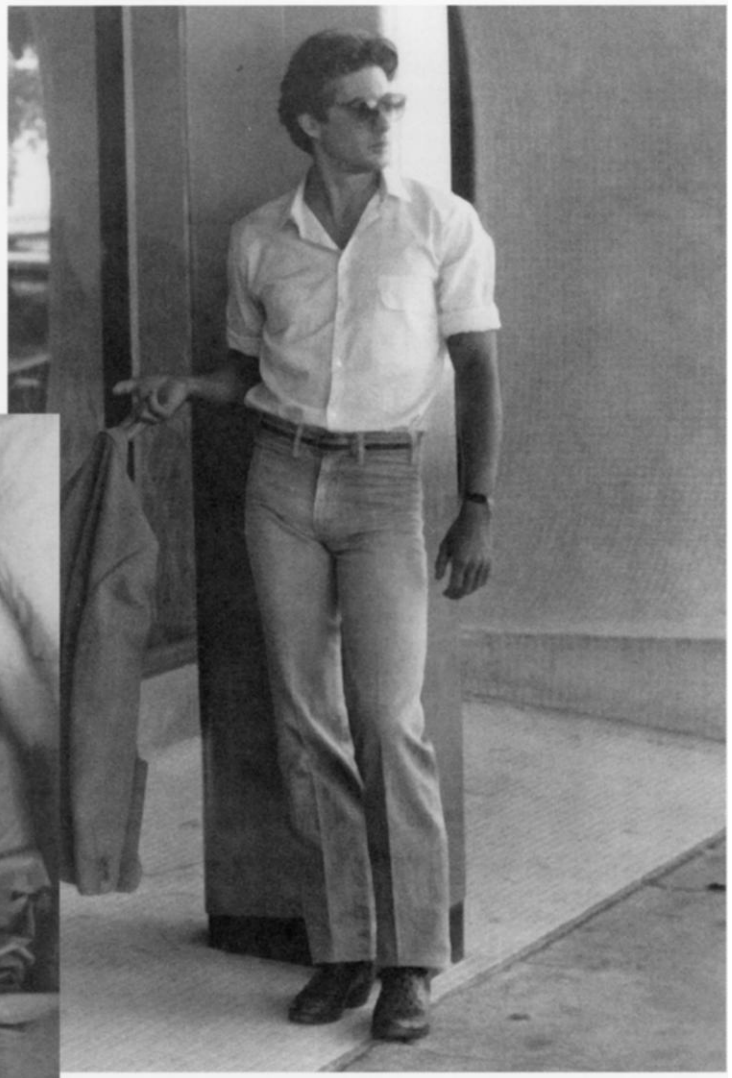
This sounds like the type of person that Sam Peckinpah described after reading the script for Play It As It Lays. *He referred to the protagonist as "the third man through the door," by which he meant that when famous people are photographed in pairs, there's always someone, usually insignificant, lurking behind them.*
I think that the third man through the door is an awfully interesting guy. If you progress from the protagonists of *Taxi Driver, American Gigolo, Light Sleeper,* and now *The Walker*—even the central character in the script I did for Scorsese's *Bringing Out the Dead*—they're all characters whom audiences wouldn't normally think of as heroes or someone to identify with. But if you can get into their lives, into their thought processes, and hang in there with them long enough, and make them interesting enough, the audience will start to identify with them. And the moment an audience identifies with a character whom they think is beneath their identification, they open the door a crack, and through that crack all kinds of strange and

Lonely Men:

Left: Robert DeNiro as
Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver*

Below: Richard Gere as hustler
Julian Kaye in *American Gigolo*

Below left: Willem Dafoe as
John Le Tour in *Light Sleeper*



wonderful things pour, some of which you can control and some of which you can't. That's the logic behind these loner tales, these "man in his room" stories. A lot of this ambience comes from the films of Robert Bresson. *Pickpocket* is really about just two characters: a man and his room.

Yet unlike the Bresson films that you deal with in your book, there's no redemption at the end of the first of these "man and his room" films, Taxi Driver, *although there is redemption at the end of the other films.*
Yes, *The Walker* too. In some ways it's like what Eric Rohmer does in his films: It's variations on a pattern, although it's not my sole vocation as a filmmaker. My latest film, *Forever Mine,* is a tribute to Douglas Sirk. It's an old-fashioned romance of the highest order, a real melodrama, which I wrote and directed and financed. Nobody paid me to do this film. If a studio had made it, everyone would be saying that I had whored out, but in fact I had to fight to raise the financing, so if I did whore out, I whored out to my own melodramatic side. It also blends in elements from Nicholas Ray, à la *Imitation of Life.*

Does it have the Sirkean divergence between suggestion and surface that has been called hysterical confusion?
It's only like Sirk in the sense of the grand melodrama; there's none of that 50s social consciousness nonsense. The film's roots are actually deeply twentieth century. It's much more like the most famous romantic book of all time that got made into a film: *Wuthering Heights.* It involves the return of a dead lover in an altered form, in which regard it's also a nineteenth-century genre piece.

It sounds like the kind of return that occurs in Obsession.
I wrote *Obsession* as a big love story, but I was never happy with how the film turned out. I eventually realized that if I was ever going to make a love epic, I'd have to write and direct it myself. I have a couple of other scripts that I want to do. One's a gangster script, another's a lonely man script.

Is there something common to all of these films?
Yes, but I'm not going to say what it is. The moment that I tell you, the fun for the critic in you goes out of it. I used to be a critic, and what's interesting about critics, good or bad, is that sometimes they're completely off the mark. Other times, they are extremely perceptive. I've read some articles in which people have nailed exactly what I've intended, as though they had been sitting in on a meeting during which I was describing what I was trying to do. And then there are some cases in which people put things together and you think they're wrong, but then you think about it and you say, Wait a second, there are some latent connections here. Maybe I find these connections unpleasant, or uncomfortable, but the critic may be right.

You know, the only reason I go to a psychiatrist (and I don't do it much anymore) is not to solve any huge problems but because the investigation of one's self is truly the most interesting thing in life. I enjoy going to a paid professional and talking about all of my secret motives, why you do things, why you say things, why certain things come to you in your dream life. It can be endlessly invigorating. Those artists who say that somehow therapy or analysis will thwart their creativity are completely misinformed. It's absolutely the opposite: it opens closed doors.

Perhaps for you. Peter Weir feels that exploring the basis of his creativity would inhibit him.
But he's wrong, and here's why: because he could never know. He's operating on the premise that somehow creativity is comprehensible. As you move up the levels of mystery, though, you end up with a compounding dilemma, a conundrum, that you can never solve: the mystery of one's own soul and psyche. Ultimately, it's an illusion that you can understand yourself.

Then all that you could possibly recognize would be patterns.
Yes, but that's still a move up in understanding.

In Transcendental Cinema *you quote Carl Jung as saying that mysteries can't be talked about, but they can be explained.*
That's the fun of it. That's also the fun and art of telling as well, that the essential core of things is a mystery, and that all you can do is explore. The myth that we sell people when we make movies, and the reason that people go to them, is that life has problems. People love this myth because it means that if there's a problem, then there has to be a solution. So what is the problem? Terrorists kidnap the president's plane. Solution: president subdues terrorists. You walk in for two hours, you walk out and say, Boy, that felt good. But life doesn't have those kinds of problems; what life has is dilemmas.

How about patterns with regard to critiquing films? If you see a film text as a kind of mystery, do you think it's valid to assert a commonality among a certain director's films?
With an approach like that, at some point you're strapping an artist onto a procrustean bed; or, to make a simple analogy, you end up jamming a square artist into

Ken Ogata as Mishima Yukio in *Mishima*

a round hole. That's the nature of the academic exercise. You're trying to simplify an experience in order to understand more about it.

Your background is Calvinist, yet you don't seem to use many overt religious symbols in your films.
Take *Bringing Out the Dead,* for example. Throughout the production I had to fight Marty Scorsese on this symbolism stuff, this Catholic nonsense, because the book on which the film is based was written by a paramedic whose experience is Catholic, and it was full of Catholic references. Marty loved all of it, but I said to him, Marty, we're too old, we've been working in the fields too long, to use all of this damned symbolism. That's a young man's game. We have to get in there and root it out. We have to change those symbolic names, change those symbolic images. If we leave them in there we're going to get critically nailed, because they're just too simplistic. We got most of them out. The hospital in the film is still a Catholic hospital, but that's about all. You know, when you're in your twenties you use a great deal of symbolism. You somehow think that a character standing beneath a cross is more interesting than a character standing underneath a billboard, but when you get a little older you realize that there's not much difference.

Given your strong thematic concerns, are there any projects that at the outset didn't seem to fit into your preference for personal filmmaking?
I got involved with *Cat People* because I thought it would be fun to direct something totally outside myself, a horror genre film. I look back at the film now, after completely rewriting the ending, and I find it as personal a film as any of the others. *Patty Hearst* became a personal film. The theme of *The Comfort of Strangers,* that men and women are inherently hostile and no amount of socialization can paper over this difference, was in the book on which the film is based. There was a scene in Harold Pinter's script that said that language is the way in which we don't communicate with each other, a classic Pinter theme. I thought that between those two notions I had enough themes. But then when the film was in preproduction, and afterwards in directing it, a third theme emerged, which wasn't really my theme but Mishima Yukio's, which is that beauty in and of itself is dangerous, that being in the physical presence of beauty is life-threatening. It's a very interesting mix of themes.

Some redemptive elements are obviously in the film. They're also in *Light Sleeper* and at the end of *The Walker*. In some films the theme is more obfuscated, but it's there. Why? Because I was raised in a world in which everything was based on the hereafter. When you're asked by your mother during your childhood whenever you do something wrong, "What if Jesus came and found you doing that?," there's an effect.

One of the things that I try to do in my work is to avoid making it so simplistic that there's no fun for the viewer, or the critic or author for that matter. The work has to be full of contradictions. You also have to avoid being schematic, especially since people tend to want to do one thing but do another, what Freud called the representation of a thing by its opposite. That's what art is all about, too, the representation of things by their opposites.

Someone accused you of "writing down" the character of Taxi Driver*'s Travis Bickle. What does that term mean?*

The writer meant that I was using an inarticulate person to express my articulate notions—basically, a form of slumming. My answer to this criticism is that *Taxi Driver* involves a pathology of suicide, and that glory is not limited to the inarticulate and uneducated. Who, for example? Mishima. There you have someone who is terribly successful, terribly accomplished, in the grips of the same pathology. *Mishima* is as far away from *Taxi Driver* as I can get on the same line. It has a completely different style. But they're both about suicidal glory. I was myself in the grips of this fantasy for about a decade. But during the making of *Mishima* my daughter was born, and that event sort of put an end to it. I will not make a film about suicidal glory again. I have written a script about Hank Williams which is also in the same genre; somebody recently wanted me to do it, and I refused. I said, I'm not into suicidal glory any more, whereupon another friend called me up and said, You know those suicidal feelings that went away? Don't worry; they'll be back.

Self-destructive feelings certainly don't seem to be absent from your film Affliction*, although they may be distanced somewhat via the film's framing device.*

Fairly early on in the production, Russell Banks said to me, "You know, the main character of the story is the narrator," by which he meant himself. The story is really about him telling the story. In the book this aspect is much clearer because everything is seen through the narrator's eyes. He's telling you about events that he's only surmising, because he's talked to people in the town. He says, then Wade did this, then Wade did that. But he's only guessing at what is going on in Wade's head. In the film, of course, you see Wade, so the frame is not as firmly fixed as it is in the novel.

Then how do you keep the frame aspect in front of the audience?

You don't. The first thing you hear is the conclusion of the story: "This is the story of my brother's strange criminal behavior and disappearance." Boom. There goes your plot; I just told you the end of the movie. It's like the title of Bresson's *A Man Escaped*; there is no real plot here.

The film is not so much about the plot as about its teller. And then, of course, the fulcrum of the narrative is when the brother returns for the mother's funeral and gives his older brother Wade the worst possible advice in the world, thereby sending him down the road that otherwise could have been avoided. He tells Wade that there was a conspiracy and a murder. But at the end of the film, the brother says, "There never was a conspiracy; it only existed in Wade's wild imaginings and briefly in mine as well." At that point, the brother feels very guilty. He'll be compulsively telling this story his whole life. As he puts it, "I remain to tell this story over and over again."

Affliction is Russell's most autobiographical book, although it's really not about him; it's about his father and grandfather. I was trying to do justice to Russell. Yet I knew that when you get into this kind of thematic territory—and I had a strong father and I have an older male sibling—I could not keep myself out of

Nick Nolte, James Coburn, Willem Dafoe, and Sissy Spacek in *Affliction*

the story. I also knew that there was no sense in trying to put myself in it, but that if I told Russell's story, sooner or later I would get in there somehow, somewhere. I also knew that if I tried to make it too personal, it would go too far, so I tried to stay away from that.

In other words, by keeping it impersonal, the personal aspect emerged.
And it's the better for it, better than trying to inject it.

Then aren't you doing what Ozu, Bresson, and Dreyer do, who by removing themselves and concentrating on telling the story through form, without cinematic embellishment, communicate the personal?
Yes. It's an avoidance of the overt approach, an avoidance that Bresson believes in. But with regard to stylization, I'm quite different from Bresson. The reason why I don't make transcendental films, the reason I don't have transcendental style, is that I believe in something that is anathema or contrary to the whole notion of transcendental cinema. I have my roots in psychological realism and audience identification with character, whereas the whole notion of transcendental style is based on repudiating psychological realism. I've always preferred a kind of nineteenth-century, existential, psychologically real type of character. We may be moving into a post-existential era—I hope not, although there are signs about us that we are—in which case the work that I do, and this approach to characterization, will be truly anachronistic.

What attracted you to the films that you wrote about in your book?
They're the product of the type of artist that I can never be. That's the pure soul. You know, I wanted to be a minister when I was a kid. I went door to door preaching God's word. But I found myself at a certain point in my life having a theological background, knowing my theology, yet having an interest in film, and I realized that there were very few people who had both. I also realized that I was too young to write a book on transcendental style, but that if I didn't do it right then I never would, because it was going to take two years of my life doing a scholarly work for which I wouldn't be paid. The book was about the purity of what I saw as the highest expression of Christian sentiment.

There's a Dutch theologian who has a quote I use at the book's beginning: "Art and religion are parallel lines, intersecting at infinity and meeting in God." Basically, they are train tracks that we lay to eventually find God. In the hypothetical distance, those two tracks will merge, but they won't ever merge in our experience. That reminds me of Andrey Sakharov's work. Do you know it?

No. What are his films like?
Mother and Son, which is his masterpiece, is about 80-90 minutes long, has probably two dozen lines of dialogue and perhaps 60 shots. We're talking real stasis here. The film's images are mesmerizing. They're extraordinary, almost a form of meditation.

And the film actually moves you beyond everything?
Yes, it does me. After I interviewed him and he left the office, I said, You know, I'm glad that he makes the films that he does, but I'd hate to be him.

Why?
Because of the self-torture you have to go through to reach purity.

Do you intentionally avoid working within the studio system in order to retain your freedom?
Actually, I'd love to work for the studios. I love those big budgets, I love those toys, I love those production schedules. The problem is, unless the agreement is set up in the right way, there's always going to be a lot of interference. The only reason, for example, that Nicolas Cage is in Scorsese's *Bringing Out the Dead* is that he agreed to make the film for a million dollars, so Marty got the freedom to make the film that he wanted. But if there had been an unknown in the lead, then even someone like Marty wouldn't have been able to make the film. Still, it's always better to make films for the studios. They know what they're doing; they're professionals. Not only do they know how to market a film, they're the bank. When you make an independent film you're working with a fixed amount of money, and when that money is used up, that's it. If Scorsese goes three weeks over schedule with *Bringing Out the Dead,* the studio just gives him more money.

I have a feeling that *Bringing Out the Dead* and *Forever Mine* are going to be successful. Then I'm going to be presented with the kind of dilemma that I haven't faced for a while: getting lucrative offers for things that I really don't want to do, which is very seductive. It's much easier to remain pure when no one's tempting you.

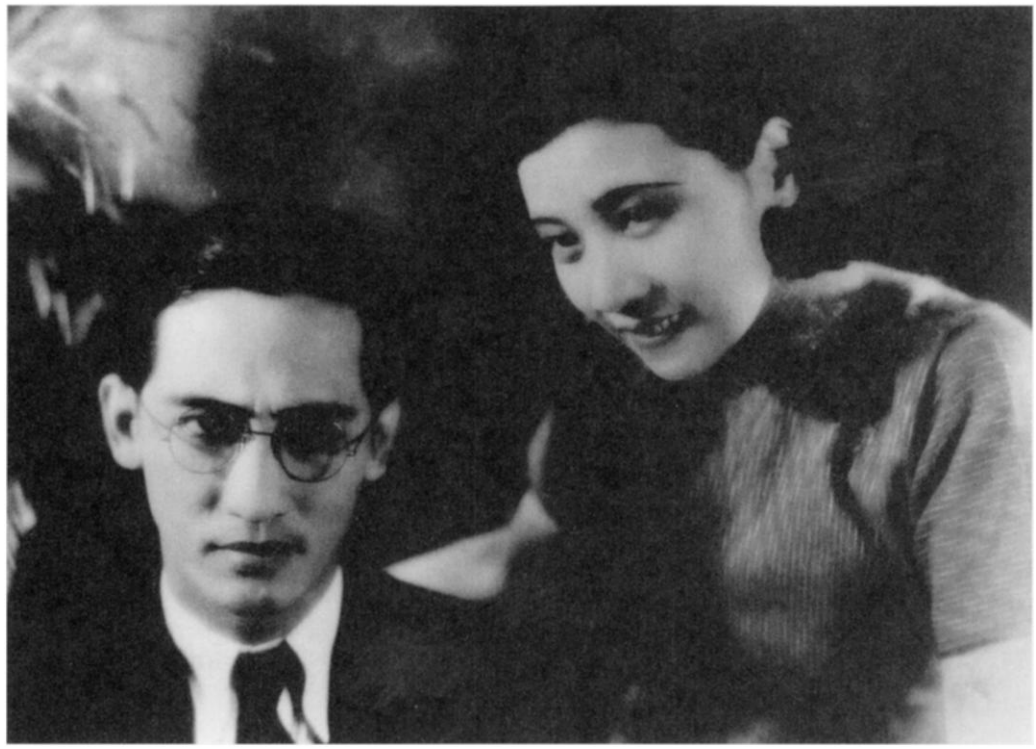
So what will you do?
We'll see.

Michael Bliss, whose latest book is *Dreams Within a Dream: The Films of Peter Weir,* teaches English and film at Virginia Tech. He is now completing *One Nation Under God: The Transcendent in American Philosophy and Film.*

Miriam Bratu Hansen

Fallen Women, Rising Stars, New Horizons

Shanghai Silent Film As Vernacular Modernism



The New Woman

This essay presents a discussion of Shanghai cinema of the 1920s and 30s as an instance of "popular" or, rather, "vernacular modernism." I have elaborated this concept in another context, with regard to American cinema of the so-called classical period, that is, from the late teens through the 1950s.[1] There I argue that the worldwide hegemony of classical Hollywood cinema, much as it was supported by aggressive industrial strategies backed by government pressure, had less to do with the classical—timeless, universal—quality of the films than with their ability to provide, to mass audiences both at home and abroad, a sensory-reflexive horizon for the experience of modernization and modernity. By sensory-reflexive horizon I mean a discursive form in which individual experience may find expression and recognition by others, including strangers, that is, in public; and this public sphere is not limited to print media but circulates through visual and sonic media, involving sensory immediacy and affect.[2] While the idea that movies might have had such a function may not be entirely new, I resume it from a somewhat different angle and at a time when the phenomenon itself, classical Hollywood cinema, seems to be becoming a matter of the past. I develop the concept of vernacular modernism, as a cultural counterpart and response to technological, economic,

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and social modernity, in relation to three areas or sets of questions.

The first pertains to the status of modernism and modernist aesthetics, specifically the by now common critique that these terms have for too long been limited to movements in literature, theater, music, painting, and sculpture, that is, to a perspective defined by the institution of art and the practice of intellectuals. However, rather than throwing out the baby of modernist aesthetics with the bathwater of high modernism, I argue for a wider notion of the aesthetic, understood as pertaining to the entire domain of human perception and sensation, as part of a history and changing economy of the senses which Walter Benjamin for one saw as the decisive battleground for the meaning and fate of modernity.[3] This claim extends the scope of modernist aesthetics to include the cultural manifestations of mass-produced, mass-mediated, and mass-consumed modernity, a wide variety of discourses that both articulated and responded to economic, political, and social processes of modernization—fashion, design, advertising, architecture and urban environment, the changing fabric of everyday life, new forms of experience, interaction, and publicness. The dimension of the quotidian, of everyday usage, combined with the connotation of language, idiom, and dialect, makes me prefer the term vernacular, vague as it may be, over the term popular, which is politically and ideologically overdetermined and historically just as unspecific.

The second area in which the concept of vernacular modernism intervenes is the unfortunate polarization, in approaches to American cinema, of the terms modernist and classical, from post-1968 psychoanalytic-semiotic film theory through the more recent elaboration of the "Classical Hollywood Cinema" within neoformalist and cognitivist frameworks.[4] I am using "classical" cinema here as a technical term which has played a crucial part in the formation of cinema studies as an academic discipline, and which describes the mode of production and film style epitomized by Hollywood during the studio era (1917–1960). In that specific sense, the term refers to the dominant model of narrative film, defined by principles of linear and unobtrusive narration centering on the psychology and agency of individual characters; thorough motivation of every element in terms of cause and effect; coherence of time and space and their subordination to narrative functions; formal patterns of repetition and variation, rhyming, balance, and symmetry; and overall compositional unity and closure. Key to the classical style is the system of continuity editing, which entails scene dissection ranging from establishing shots through close-ups, following conventions such as shot/reverse-shot, match on action, point-of-view editing, etc. The continuity system not only ensures the bending of all cinematic material to the logic of narrative and individual character, but also creates the effect of a closed diegesis, a seemingly autonomous fictional world which the viewer can access fantasmatically, as a privileged and invisible guest.

It is the ostensible transparency and neutrality of these devices, the illusory fullness, mastery, and identification afforded by the "imaginary signifier," which psychoanalytic-semiotic film theory of the 1970s pinpointed as the prime ideological effect of classical Hollywood cinema, its way of naturalizing particular economies of race, gender, property, and power.[5] In a similar vein, though from a diametrically opposed position, neoformalist cognitivists such as David Bordwell have attributed the success, stability, and transcultural appeal of the classical paradigm to aesthetic principles that are based in "nature" (an argument familiar from the tradition of neoclassicism). According to this position, classical narration has merely figured out how optimally to engage the viewer's attention, that is, how to work with mental structures and perceptual capacities that are "biologically hard-wired" and have been so for tens of thousands of years—hence the similarity of "'canonical' story formats" in different cultures (meaning largely the West); hence the continuing adherence to classical norms in Hollywood even after the end of the classical studio period.[6]

Whether the model of classicality is seventeenth- and eighteenth-century neoclassicist aesthetics (as for neoformalism) or the nineteenth-century novel (as for 1970s film theory in its reductive reading of Roland Barthes), both approaches have effectively managed to evacuate from classical cinema any association with the modern. Concomitantly, the term modernist is reserved for alternative forms of film practice (experimental and avant-garde film, international art cinema) that are in turn closer to the intellectual and elite movements of literary and artistic modernism.[7] This bifurcation, however, strikes me as oddly anachronistic. After all, Hollywood cinema was perceived, not just in the United States but in modernizing capitals all over the world, as an incarnation of *the modern*, an aesthetic medium up-to-date with Fordist-Taylorist methods of industrial production and the promises of mass consumption, with drastic changes in social, gender, and generational relations, and with the restructuration of experience and subjectivity. Again and again, writings of the 1920s and 30s celebrate American cinema for its distinctly new, contemporary sensibility, its sense of

youth, vitality, and spontaneity, its democratic ethos and claim to gender equality (attacked by opponents as a "new matriarchy"). Likewise, these writings stress aesthetic qualities that are not exactly classical or classicist, at least not in the sense of preserving tradition, decorum, proportion, and harmony. What was perceived as new and contemporary in American films was their physicality, directness, speed, their affinity with the exterior surface or "outer skin" of things (Antonin Artaud), the material presence of the quotidian—as Louis Aragon put it, "really common objects, everything that celebrates life, not some artificial convention that excludes corned beef and tins of polish."[8]

The third area this discussion pertains to is the vexed question of "Americanism," that is, the question as to why, how, and to what effects an industrially produced, mass-based vernacular developed in one country achieved international and global hegemony during (a) particular historical period(s). What I'm interested in is a more differentiated understanding of the worldwide hegemony of U.S. cultural commodities, at least prior to the Cold War, beyond the polarized labels of either a benign spreading of the American Dream or, respectively, systematic cultural imperialism. As Victoria de Grazia has reminded us, it is important to distinguish between Americanism and imperial practices of colonial dumping, in that American cultural exports "were designed to go as far as the market would take them, starting at home." In other words, "cultural exports shared the basic features of American mass culture, intending by that term not only the cultural artifacts and associated forms, but also the civic values and social relations of the first capitalist mass society."[9] For the cinema, this would suggest that the devices by which Hollywood succeeded in amalgamating a diversity of competing traditions, discourses, and interests on the *domestic* level, that is, by forging a mass public out of an ethnically and culturally heterogeneous society (if often at the expense of racial others), may have accounted for at least some of the generalized appeal and robustness of Hollywood products *abroad* (a success in which the immigrant, and relatively cosmopolitan, profile of the Hollywood community no doubt played a part as well).

I do not mean to resuscitate the myth of film as a new "universal language," whose early promoters included D. W. Griffith and Carl Laemmle; nor do I wish to deny or minimize the brutal business practices by which the American film industry secured the dominance of its products on the market.[10] But I do think that, whether we like it or not, American movies of the classical period offered something like the first global vernacular. If this vernacular had a transnational and translatable resonance it was not just because of its optimal mobilization of biologically hard-wired structures and universal narrative templates, but because this vernacular played a key role in mediating competing cultural discourses on modernity and modernization; because it articulated, brought into *optical consciousness* (to vary Benjamin), and disseminated a particular historical experience.[11] For the cinema was not only part and promoter of technological, industrial-capitalist modernity; it was also the single most inclusive, *public* horizon in which both the liberating impulses and the pathologies of modernity were reflected, rejected, or disavowed, transmuted or negotiated, and it made this new mass public visible to itself and to society.[12] What is more, Hollywood's reflexive relation to modernity may have triggered cognitive processes in its viewers, but these cognitive effects were crucially anchored in sensory experience and affect, in moments of mimetic identification that were more often than not partial and excessive in relation to narrative comprehension and closure.

If classical Hollywood cinema succeeded as an international modernist idiom on a mass basis, it did so not because of its presumably universal narrative form, but because it meant different things to different people and publics, both at home and abroad. We must not forget that these films, along with other mass-cultural exports, were consumed in locally quite specific, and unequally developed, contexts and conditions of *reception*; that they not only had a levelling impact on indigenous cultures but also challenged prevailing social and sexual arrangements and advanced new possibilities of identity and cultural styles; and that the films themselves were also changed in that process. Many films were literally changed, both for particular export markets (for example, American happy endings were converted into tragic endings for Russian release) and by censorship, marketing, and programming practices in the countries in which they were shown, not to mention practices of dubbing and subtitling.[13] As systematic as the effort to conquer foreign markets undoubtedly was, the actual reception of Hollywood films was probably a much more haphazard and eclectic process, depending on a variety of factors: how the films were presented and in which exhibition contexts; which genres were preferred in which places (for instance, slapstick in European and African countries, musicals and historical costume dramas in India), and how American genres were dissolved and assimilated into the different generic traditions of local film culture; and how the films figured within the public

horizon of reception, which might have included both indigenous products and films from other foreign countries. To write the international history of classical American cinema, therefore, is a matter of tracing not just its mechanisms of standardization and hegemony but also the diversity of ways in which this cinema was translated and reconfigured in both local and translocal contexts of reception.

The issue of Americanism makes clear that classical cinema cannot be thought of as a homogeneous, bounded phenomenon, whether at home or abroad, let alone as a functionalist system, however flexible. For there were at least two kinds of Americanism that were noted in the reception of Hollywood cinema: one referring to its economy of narration and particular stylistic principles (classical scene dissection and continuity editing), that is, classicism in the narrower, neoclassicist sense; the other celebrating a new sensibility, to be found in particular genres (especially "low" genres such as slapstick comedy, adventure serials, and detective films, with their emphasis on action and attractions, speed and thrills), as well as in the star system and particular stars—that is, aspects of the *cinema experience* that worked along with the classical paradigm but were also in tension with it, centrifugal to its principles.[14]

Genre diversity, stars, and fan cults, attractions like theater architecture, live music, and the "show" lead us into the field of *film culture*, which in turn was part of an emerging modern culture of fashion, entertainment, and leisure, in the United States and elsewhere. As Marie Cambon observes regarding the reception of Hollywood films in pre-occupation Shanghai: "A member of the audience might bring along his or her tailor to copy the latest fashion off the screen and filmmakers themselves could spend hours in the movie theatre to learn their craft from the newest American import."[15] Cutting lessons of a different kind, to be sure, though one did not exclude the other. The question is not whether this proves the identity, universality, and superiority of the classical Hollywood model, but to which uses these lessons were put, what happened in the process of cultural translation, and what work did the reinscriptions do within a fast-transforming, at once cosmopolitan and local public sphere.

If my claim that the cinema, a certain kind of cinema, offered a sensory-reflexive horizon for the contradictory experience of modernity has any merit, it should be the case that parallel, yet distinct, forms of vernacular modernism emerged in other modernizing, metropolitan centers as well, and not just in the West. The problem with this hypothesis is not only that it risks reproducing the hegemony of the Western idiom at the level of theory and historiography; it also disregards the basic asymmetry created by the suppression of local film practice by American products early on (and before them by French)—the fact that cinema arrived, and was perceived, as part of Western technological and cultural modernity. (In this regard, though, I would like to reassert de Grazia's point that it is crucial to distinguish the function of Hollywood from older, colonial forms of metropolitan culture.) Nonetheless, I would argue that Shanghai cinema of the 1920s and 30s represents a distinct brand of vernacular modernism, one that evolved in a complex relation to American—and other foreign—models while drawing on and transforming Chinese traditions in theater, literature, graphic and print culture, both modernist and popular. I think this case can be made at several levels: the thematic concerns of the films; their mise-en-scène and visual style; their formal strategies of narration, including modes of performance, character construction, and spectatorial identification; and the films' address to and function within a specific horizon of reception.

This is a tall order, to be sure, and I will most definitely fall short of delivering it: I am neither an expert on Chinese film history or Shanghai modernity, nor do I speak or read Chinese. The following remarks are based on my viewing of about 30 Chinese films at the Giornate del Cinema Muto in Pordenone, Italy, in 1995 and 1997.[16] The period covered ranged from 1922, the year of the allegedly earliest extant complete Chinese film, *Laborer's Love* (*Laogong zhi aiqing,* dir. Zhang Shichuan), to 1937, the Japanese occupation of Shanghai, and the eventual implementation of synchronized sound.

Shanghai cinema has been constructed in film history under a number of different headings and from divergent critical perspectives. The established narrative in Communist film history divides the period into two parts, dismissing domestic film production of the 1920s as frivolous entertainment ("immature" and "chaotic") produced for the Western-dominated Chinese film market. The Golden Age of Chinese cinema, according to this view, began only in the early 1930s, with directors such as Sun Yu, Cai Chusheng, Wu Yonggang, and Chen Bugao producing works of social realism that advanced the cause of the revolution. Motivated by the attempt to compete with Hollywood products on the Chinese market and, after 1931/32, by patriotic anti-imperialism that partially converged with the Guomingdang position, these filmmakers were

canonized as the coming to fruition, in the popular medium of film, of the May Fourth tradition in literature, the movement of intellectual enlightenment that shaped Chinese modern(ist) culture.[17]

This view has been challenged from a number of perspectives which intersect on the question of the impact of Hollywood on both domestic products and local film culture. One line of critique acknowledges the radical ethos of the Golden Age films, but claims that their radicality is undermined by formal and stylistic adherence to American models, in particular continuity editing and the genre of melodrama. Thus Paul Pickowicz argues that the 1930s films taking up issues of oppression and injustice, such as Sun Yu's "leftist tear-jerker" *Little Toys* (*Xiao wanyi*, 1933), lack any of the "original May Fourth respect for diversity, complexity, and subtlety of social analysis" because of their melodramatic polarization of good and evil, country and city, mothers and mistresses, traditional Chinese values and modern, foreign fashions. *Little Toys,* Pickowicz asserts, remains a "lesson in elementary Marxism whose ability to reach the public depends on the rhetorical excesses of the melodramatic format."[18] This critique not only assumes a monolithic and condescending notion of melodrama, but it also remains fixated on literary standards (those of May Fourth modernism). It is Pickowicz who fails to recognize the "diversity, complexity, and subtlety" of these *films*, inasmuch as he does not consider their visual, narrational, and performance style—cinematically specific qualities that make them rank among the most sophisticated and vibrant works of silent cinema worldwide.

More recently, scholars have begun to approach Chinese silent films within the wider framework of metropolitan film culture and Shanghai modernity—or, to borrow Leo Ou-fan Lee's term, the "Shanghai modern" —establishing the cinema's centrality to the burgeoning mass culture of leisure, entertainment, and fashion, of cafés and tea houses, department stores, dance halls, night clubs, and brothels.[19] This approach situates the films within a wide array of media and discourses, on the one hand those specific to the cinema (trade press, fan magazines, writings and reviews in newspapers, general periodicals, and women's journals, the architectural design of movie theaters, exhibition practices, posters, program notes, etc.), on the other those relating to both older and newer forms of popular entertainment (the shadow play, Peking opera, modern spoken drama), to a modernist visual style in design, advertisement, and architecture, as well as to the popular fiction of the school of "mandarin ducks and butterflies" of the 1910s and 20s, known for its sensationalism, sentimentality, and formulaic plots. Tracing a wealth of intertextual and intermedia relations both within individual films and in Shanghai film culture makes it possible to recognize the films' modernist aesthetics as linked to vernacular forms of modernism—graphic, artistic, and literary—outside the cinema, rather than judging the films by the narrow standards of literary-intellectual modernism. In the same move, the canon of Chinese silent film is opened up to include a greater diversity of genres, including historical costume dramas, martial arts serials featuring female protagonists, and comedies. Last but not least, this approach also casts a different light on Chinese films' relation to Hollywood, shifting the discussion from moralistic oppositions of originality versus imitation, native idiom versus foreign market culture, to a more differentiated analysis of the stylistic hybridity of these films —a hybridity that affords multiple openings for a heterogeneous, unstable, emerging mass public.

Now, in which way can these films be said to have functioned as a vernacular modernism, as a sensory-reflexive discourse of the experience of modernity and modernization, a matrix for the articulation of fantasies, uncertainties, and anxieties?

At the most basic level, we have to consider the *look* of these films: the visual world they depict or, more strongly put, design and produce. Whether a film's message is pro- or anti-modern, you are likely to see the most amazing art deco settings in almost any film of that period, settings (mostly high-society) that match the architecture of the movie theaters and the design of poster, program notes, and fan magazines. (There are also quite a few films that explicitly depict the so-called film world itself, for instance, *Two Stars in the Milky Way* [*Yinhe Shuangxing*, 1931], or more generally the glamor, decadence, and tragedy that comes with stardom and success.) The visual world thus projected is a fantasy or imaginary space, to be sure; but it brought into optical consciousness a modernist look that could be copied, mass-produced for wider consumption and more ordinary, everyday usage. What is more, many of the films put this world on the same map with less glamorous spaces of urban living: overcrowded housing, dingy cabins and apartments, factories, offices, bustling and unsafe streets.

At a more structural, symbolic level, Shanghai films respond to the pressures of modernity in their thematic concerns, through particular oppositions and contradictions that structure the narrative and inform the constellations of characters. Prominent among these is the "city/country antithesis," a venerable trope that has a

Spring Silkworms

persistent currency in the cultural imagination of modern China well into the present. This is not surprising for a city whose population almost tripled between 1910 and 1930, thanks to migrants from surrounding rural areas who experienced the disembedding of social relations on a mass scale and who encountered urban modernity in a highly cosmopolitan, violent, and volatile variant (due to Shanghai's position as a semi-colonial treaty port).[20] Many of the films stage clashes between traditional and modern values and lifestyles through a topography of city vs. country (e.g., *Wild Rose* [*Ye Meigui*], *Lost Lambs* [*Mitu De Gaoyang*], *Daybreak* [*Tianming*], *Peach Blossom Weeps Tears of Blood* [*Toahua Qi Xue Ji*]). But very rarely do the films preserve, let alone resolve, this opposition in terms of "clearly identifiable bipolar forces," as one critic claims.[21] Rather, as Jay Leyda observes, most of the protagonists were "peasants forced to leave village miseries to endure city miseries."[22] Even in a canonic film like *Spring Silkworms* (*Chuncan*, dir. Chen Bugao, 1933), the irruption of the capitalist market into traditional country life and labors is matched by the no less irrational destruction wreaked upon the peasant's wife by the villagers' gossip and superstition. What makes these films modern or, more precisely, modernist, is that they dramatize conflicts and contradictions that may be *phrased* in traditional terms but cannot be *resolved* with recourse to or by restoring a traditional social order, regardless of whether or not the films end up espousing the revolution.

As in other silent cinemas (Russian, Scandinavian, German, French), the contradictions of modernity are enacted through the figure of the woman, very often, literally, across the body of the woman who tries to live them but more often than not fails, who has to become a corpse by the end of the film. As in many nineteenth-century literary traditions, women function as metonymies, if not allegories of urban modernity, figuring the city in its allure, instability, anonymity, and illegibility, which is often suggested through juxtapositions of women's faces and bodies with the lights of Shanghai, abstracted into hieroglyphics. In more narrative terms, female protagonists serve as the focus of social injustice and oppression; rape, thwarted romantic love, rejection, sacrifice, prostitution function as metaphors of a civilization in crisis.

As Rey Chow has argued, such figurations of the woman in modern Chinese culture represent a kind

of "third world" primitivism, which "becomes a way to point the moral of a humanity that is consciously ethnicized and nationalized, the humanity that is 'Chinese.'"[23] Chow identifies this ideological tendency as the common denominator between "butterfly" fiction and the May Fourth modernists. However, as I will argue through the example of *Daybreak* (*Tianming*, dir. Sun Yu, 1933), this tendency is complicated in the medium of film because of both the heterogeneity of filmic discourse and the dynamics of the cinematic institution. The meanings of a film are not only determined by directorial intention and an underlying social, masculinist discourse, but are significantly shaped by other voices, such as the mode of performance and the degree of agency, however precarious, that accrues to female actors in the star system; and both are contingent upon processes of reception and interpretation on the part of a mass audience in which women were present in unprecedented numbers. In other words, while female figures may well be the privileged fetish of male/modernist projection and stereotyping, they are also the sites of greatest ambivalence and mobility, as traditional binarisms may be at once invoked and undermined through performance and masquerade.

Yingjin Zhang, in his book *The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film*, distinguishes among four types of city woman in Chinese films of the early 1930s: the conventional woman who represents traditional values and is rewarded with an "ideal" marriage and "blissful family life"; the woman who indulges in fantasy, sentimentality, and sensuality (analogous to the movie fan); the career woman who oscillates between the ideal of self-realization and selfish stardom; and the politically progressive "militant" who serves as the voice of conscience for the leftist movement.[24] This is obviously a more differentiated typology than that of the (Western) melodramatic binarism of virginal/maternal innocence and fallen womanhood. The issue, however, is still more complex. For while these female types can easily be recognized in secondary characters, most of the protagonists exceed or resist any pure typification or allegorical labelling—except the contradictory and contested label of the "New Woman."[25] What makes the heroines of Shanghai silent films so memorable is that they oscillate among different types and incompatible identities; that they struggle against an oppressive patriarchal economy; and that they are who they are or become who society thinks they are as much by circumstance and chance as by "character."

The woman played by Ruan Lingyu in the famous film *Goddess* (*Shennü*, dir. Wu Yonggang, 1934) works as a prostitute to support her illegitimate child and give him an education, but that does not make her a fallen woman for the filmic narration, only in the eyes of a hypocritical school board; nor is she simply a maternal saint.[26] In *Love and Duty* (*Lian'ai yu yiwu*, dir. Richard Poh [Bo Wancang], 1931), Ruan plays a woman who opts for romantic love (with Valentino look-alike Jin Yan) over staying in an unhappy arranged marriage with a philandering husband, a successful author of popular novels about heroic young men which are in fact ghostwritten by his wife. Of course, she gets ostracized, punished with separation from her children, whom she reencounters as an aged dressmaker and who do not recognize her. Still, the film does not condemn her for her earlier choice. What is more, to a Shanghai audience, she is neither adulteress nor self-sacrificing mother but Ruan Lingyu, consummate performer and star, celebrated for both her looks and her artistry. (As has

Goddess

Queen of Sport

often been suggested, most powerfully in Stanley Kwan's film *Center Stage / The Actress* [Hong Kong, 1991], the cruel irony of Ruan's fate was that, despite her success and remarkable degree of self-authorization, the performer herself became the victim of the same kind of hypocritical hounding, compounded by the tabloids, that was denounced in her films. Like the protagonist of her last film, *The New Woman* [*Xin Nuxing*, dir. Choy Chor Sang, 1935], she committed suicide, at age 25, which provoked an outpouring of public grief comparable to that surrounding Rudolph Valentino's death nine years earlier.)[27]

An even more pronounced sense of performance and of a differentiation between character and star can be found in Li Lili and Wang Renmei, actresses who are perhaps not quite as spiritual, psychologically nuanced, and tragic as Ruan. In *Queen of Sport* (*Tiyu Huanghou*, dir. Sun Yu, 1934), Li starts out as the "natural" country girl who arrives in the city, which provides the occasion for a virtuoso montage of Shanghai urban-industrial views, a topos in many of these films. Having risen to stardom in the sports academy, she temporarily succumbs to the temptations of dating, dancing, and Western fashion. At the same time, the film's promotion of a new physicality (in line with the emerging New Life Movement), together with an almost Americanist celebration of youth and shining white teeth, of seriality and collectivity staged through mass ornament shots, makes the stereotype of the falling woman slide into an alternative that does not exactly conform to Confucian standards.[28] In the camera's emphasis on physical activity and health, the star's body, including individual body parts, becomes a privileged site of visual pleasure and display, with or without makeup, and thus provides a relay of desire and identification with a modern culture of fashion and consumption, whether Western international or cosmopolitan Shanghai.

In Shanghai cinema's negotiation of the clash between traditional Chinese values and contemporary fashionable femininity, the figure of the "painted lady," the woman who uses cosmetics to enhance her attractiveness, emerges as a key trope, a pervasive cliché that spawns fascinating oscillations and reinscriptions—which makes it a good example of what I mean by the vernacular-modernist quality of Shanghai silent film. The trope of female makeup, often combined with Western hair style, runs through many of these films, sometimes as a motivating factor in the plot ("vanity, the source of all troubles in women," says

Daybreak

an intertitle in *The Pearl Necklace* [*Yichuan Zhenzu*, dir. Li Zeyuan, 1926]), though more often as a shorthand of characterization, marking the woman as either superficial, and therefore at risk, or already fallen (e.g., *Spring in the South* [*Nanguo zhi chun*, 1932] and *National Style* [*Guo Feng*, 1935]). In the more socially conscious films, like Ruan's *Goddess* and *The New Woman*, scenes of the protagonist putting on makeup metonymically signal the self-commodification, self-abnegation, and abjection involved in prostitution. In films starring Li Lili, the trope is used both conventionally, for purposes of characterization and plot (as in *Blood of Love* [*Huoshan Qing Xue*, 1932] and *National Style*) and, in more interesting ways, as a performative device. Let me elaborate this point with the example of *Daybreak* (*Tianming*, 1933), a film that links the trope of female makeup to a pervasive discourse on masquerade and performance, both social and political. (I should note that *Daybreak* is not only a star vehicle for Li but also the seventh film of director Sun Yu, probably the best known auteur of Shanghai cinema, who, in the 1920s, studied literature, drama, screenwriting, and cinematography at Madison, New York University, and Columbia.[29])

Daybreak tracks its protagonists, Ling Ling (Li) and Zhang (played by matinee idol Gao Zhangfei, another Chinese Valentino), from a mass exodus from their village, through their encounters with attractions of city life and the hell of industrial-capitalist labor and prostitution, to Ling Ling's eventual execution by a warlord tribunal and Zhang's participation in the victorious struggle of the Nationalist revolution. The figure of the painted lady first appears with their cousin's wife, who is shown refreshing her makeup instead of helping a fellow worker who has fainted as they are filing out of the factory. Doomed to die from tuberculosis, the cousin's wife initiates the film's exploration of forms of sexual exploitation that complement the oppression and injustice of the factory floor.[30] After her fiancé has been unjustly fired and removed for a year to work on an ocean liner, Ling Ling is forced to join the cousin's wife on the "night shift," which means entertaining the factory owner's son and getting raped by him. Following a further assault by the supervisor, she is kidnapped and forced to work in a brothel. At this point, the film echoes an earlier scene, during the couple's first tour through Shanghai's red-light district, which shows a line-up of smiling and laughing prostitutes adorned with oversize flowers

("flower girls" being the Chinese euphemism for prostitute). Only now Ling Ling herself is part of the lineup, framed more closely, and we see how the earlier smiles have been produced: under threat of physical violence, by order of the madam. But the smile does not simply remain a sign of pain and powerlessness, as it does in Lillian Gish's famous gesture in D.W. Griffith's *Broken Blossoms*; Ling Ling tries out her new face and, for a brief moment, makes it her own, smiling like glamorous Li Lili.

From this point on, Ling Ling is no longer readable in naturalistic terms, as a psychologically motivated, basically intelligible and coherent character who functions as an agent of narrative causality.[31] The latter is still by and large the case for the first part of the film, in which she is established as the focus of the narration by means of repeated point-of-view shots (in particular some highly subjective shots in the scene in which the boss's son forces her to get drunk) and, when she returns home after being raped, by a moving flashback to an idyllic scene back home showing her picking lotus flowers with Zhang. Such techniques not only serve the purpose of characterization but also provide perceptual focalization and affective identification for the viewer. In the second part, however, Ling Ling's face becomes a façade, a mask, a cypher, a mystery; in fact, dissimulation, masquerade, and performance become her strategies of survival, even as she faces the firing squad.[32] In this regard, Li resembles Marlene Dietrich, the star she was frequently compared to and whose performance in *Dishonored* (Josef von Sternberg, 1931) the ending of *Daybreak* self-consciously quotes. But it does so with a significant twist.

In the second part of the film, Ling Ling appropriates the cliché of the painted lady, along with the mask of the smiling face, with great ingenuity and imagination. Liberated from the brothel by a raid aimed at revolutionaries, she now works on her own, presumably still as a prostitute, but uses her earnings to feed the poor (who are marked as rural migrants, including a girl from Ling Ling's old village). On duty and off, she looks cheerfully modern: white beret, flashy jewelry, black stockings (in close-up), repeated applications of makeup in public. And she has learnt to maximize her skills American-style, with Fordist-Taylorist efficiency: In a nightclub, we find her at a table with four customers, flirting with each of them individually through furtive glances and gestures, behind the others' backs or under the table, and convincing each that he's the one. When she eventually gets arrested for harboring her fiancé, who has returned as a revolutionary, she wields the same tricks, culminating in the scene that quotes *Dishonored*. In response to the death sentence, she takes out her mirror and applies lipstick, as an intertitle has her exclaim, "Finish me—but the revolution will never be finished!" Extending the Dietrich-Sternberg source, however, the handsome young captain who intervenes on her behalf (and who in the end, refusing to give the firing order, is killed himself) helps Ling Ling stage the ultimate masquerade: he brings her country clothes to wear for the execution, similar to the clothes she had worn in the beginning of the film and which she now dons, primping and posing at some length, before she leaves the prison cell to go to her death.[33] The protracted execution scene ends with Ling Ling collapsing onto the captain's dead body, superimposed over shots of marching revolutionary soldiers—a sacrificial-redemptive pathos that the Dietrich figure in *Dishonored* is denied.

This execution scene could be said to answer to another, which has become a founding topos for historians of Chinese film. Recalling a formative moment of his career, May Fourth author Lu Xun describes watching, while in Japan studying medicine in 1906, an actuality film about local Chinese being executed for collaborating with the enemy in the Russo-Japanese War. What appalled him even more than the cruelty of the act itself was the indifference of the Chinese onlookers in the film, their passive acceptance of "such futile spectacles."[34] This scene of spectatorship, victimization, and acquiescence prompted Lu Xun to return home and become a writer, that is, to engage in the project of renewing Chinese culture from within the institution of literature. By the 1920s and 30s, however, Chinese culture had modernized in ways that exceeded the purview of literary and intellectual modernism. It had developed responses to modernization in a wide range of media and on a mass scale, spawning a vernacular form of modernism. This modernist vernacular may not always have tallied with the ideals of national culture formulated in literary and political discourse at the time, but it clearly represented an idiom of its own kind, a locally and culturally specific aesthetics. As I have suggested with regard to *Daybreak*, the film's relationship to classical Hollywood cinema is neither one of imitation nor one of outright parody; nor does the film reject the Western model so as to link its revolutionary message to ostensibly more authentic, traditional Chinese values. Rather, *Daybreak* achieves a translation, hybridization, and reconfiguration of foreign (and not just American) as well as indigenous discourses on modernity and modernization. To paraphrase Ackbar Abbas, it produces the local, a local vernacular modernism, in and through the process of cultural translation.[35]

Whether that process also extends in the other direction, in the form of products that could be exported and circulate internationally, is another question and one that requires research beyond the scope here. To be sure, Shanghai films of the 1920s and 30s did not have the same currency on foreign markets as did Hong Kong films of the 1970s and 80s, a cinema that resumed and revived the vernacular-modernist tradition—in a different key and on a more global scale. Still, Shanghai films were able to compete with Hollywood products on the domestic market. If films such as *Daybreak* succeeded, they did so because they offered a reflexive horizon for the experience of modernity in its specific Shanghai—semi-colonial, cosmopolitan—constellations to a heterogeneous mass public, a public characterized by an unprecedented number and visibility of women and preoccupied with the erosion of class and gender hierarchies, in particular traditional standards of femininity. To engage that public, to address its specific needs and fantasies, films had to be at once robust and porous enough to allow for multiple readings—melodramatic and sentimental, connoisseur and critical, straight or camp—which evokes quite a different, more active scene of spectatorship from that excoriated by Lu Xun. In other words, Shanghai cinema must have allowed its viewers to come away from the film and imagine their own strategies of survival, performance, and sociality, to make sense of living in the interstices of radically unequal times, places, and conditions.

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Notes

1. "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism," forthcoming in: Linda Williams and Christine Gledhill, eds., *Reinventing Film Studies* (London: Edward Arnold, 2000); also in *Modernism/Modernity* 6.2 (1999): 59–77.
2. My understanding of the public sphere as a general social "horizon of experience" is indebted to Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *The Public Sphere and Experience* (1972), tr. Peter Labanyi, Jamie Daniel, Assenka Oksiloff, intr. M. Hansen (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
3. Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered," *October* 62 (Fall 1992): 3–41; also → M. Hansen, "Benjamin and Cinema: Not a One-Way Street," *Critical Inquiry* 25.2 (Winter 1999): 306–43.
4. See, for instance, texts by Jean-Louis Baudry, Christian Metz, Raymond Bellour, Stephen Heath, Laura Mulvey, and Colin MacCabe in Philip Rosen, ed., *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). For examples of neoformalist and cognitivist approaches, see David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); D. Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); K. Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988); Noël Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving Image* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); N. Carroll, "Prospects for Film Theory: A Personal Assessment," *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, ed. D. Bordwell and N. Carroll (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 37–70. Also see Jane Gaines, ed., *Classical Hollywood Narrative: The Paradigm Wars* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992).
5. See, for instance, Editors of *Cahiers du cinéma*, "John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*," Raymond Bellour, "The Obvious and the Code," Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Colin MacCabe, "Theory and Film: Principles of Realism and Pleasure," Stephen Heath, "Narrative Space," all reprinted in Rosen, *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*; Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier* (1977), tr. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster, and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982).
6. Bordwell, "*La Nouvelle Mission de Feuillade*; or, What Was Mise-en-Scène?," *The Velvet Light Trap* 37 (1996): 23; Bordwell, *Narration and the Fiction Film*, 35; also see Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 142, and Bordwell, "Convention, Construction, and Cinematic Vision," in *Post-Theory*, 87–107. Kristin Thompson's new study is concerned with the persistence of classical principles past 1960, see *Storytelling in the New Hollywood: Understanding Classical Narrative Technique* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).
7. For a critical account of this tendency, see D. N. Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ide-*

ology in Contemporary Film Theory (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

8. Antonin Artaud, "The Shell and the Clergyman: Film Scenario," *transition* 29–30 (June 1930): 65, quoted in Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film* (1960; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 189; Louis Aragon, "On Decor" (1918) in Richard Abel, ed., *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/Anthology, 1907–1939*, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), I:165. Also see ibid., Colette, "Cinema: The Cheat"; Louis Delluc, "Beauty in the Cinema" (1917) and "From Orestes to Rio Jim" (1921); Blaise Cendrars, "The Modern: A New Art, the Cinema" (1919); Jean Epstein, "Magnification" (1921); and "*Bonjour cinéma* and other writings by Jean Epstein," tr. Tom Milne, *Afterimage*, no.10 [n.d.]: esp. 9–16.
9. Victoria de Grazia, "Americanism for Export," *Wedge* 7–8 (Winter-Spring 1985): 74–81; 77. On European versions of Americanism, see, for instance, Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Thomas J. Saunders, *Hollywood in Berlin: American Cinema and Weimar Germany* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), esp. chaps. 4 & 5; Alf Lüdtke, Inge Marßolek, Adelheid von Saldern, eds., *Amerikanisierung: Traum und Alptraum im Deutschland des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1996); Jean-Louis Cohen and Humbert Damisch, eds., *Américanisme et modernité: L'idéal américain dans l'architecture* (Paris: EHESS, Flammarion, 1993).
10. On the role of foreign markets for the American film industry, see K. Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment* (London: British Film Institute, 1985); Ian Jarvie, *Hollywood's Overseas Campaign: The North Atlantic Movie Trade, 1920–1950* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); David W. Ellwood and Rob Kroes, eds., *Hollywood in Europe: Experiences of a Cultural Hegemony* (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit Press, 1994); Ruth Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood, 1918–1939* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997). On the celebration of film as a new "universal language" during the 1910s, see M. Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 76–81, 183–87.
11. Benjamin develops the notion of an "optical *un*conscious" in "A Short History of Photography" (1931), tr. Stanley Mitchell, *Screen* 13 (Spring 1972): 7–8, and in his famous essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, tr. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 235–37.
12. The significance of the cinema as a new and alternative public sphere was theorized, in the context of the German 1920s, by Siegfried Kracauer, who wrote hundreds of reviews and essays on an emerging media, mass, and consumer culture; in particular, see "Cult of Distraction" (1926), in Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, tr., ed., and intr. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 323–28.
13. On the practice of converting happy endings of American films into "Russian endings," see Yuri Tsivian, "Some Preparatory Remarks on Russian Cinema," *Silent Witnesses: Russian Films 1908–1919*, ed. Paolo Cherchi Usai et al. (London: British Film Institute, 1989), 24; also see Mary Ann Doane, "Melodrama, Temporality, Recognition: American and Russian Silent Cinema," *Cinefocus* (Bloomington, IN), 2:1 (Fall 1991): 13–26.
14. On the popularity of American "low" genres in Soviet Russia, see Tsivian, "Between the Old and the New: Soviet Film Culture in 1918–1924," *Griffithiana* 55/56 (1996): 15–63. On the tension between the film as classically constructed product and the cinema experience, see Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, 99–101 & passim.
15. Marie Cambon, "The Dream Palaces of Shanghai: American Films in China's Largest Metropolis Prior to 1949," *Asian Cinema* 7 (1995): 34.
16. For a filmography, see Cheng Jihua, Li Shaobai, Xing Zuwen, "Chinese Cinema: Catalogue of Films, 1905–1937," tr. Derek Elley, *Griffithiana* 54 (October 1995): 4–91, and the highly useful dossier compiled and translated by Elley, "Peach Blossom Dreams: Silent Chinese Cinema Remembered," *Griffithiana* 60/61 (October 1997): 126–79. At the Pordenone festival, the Chinese films were shown with simultaneous translation whenever intertitles were not bilingual; for the films shown on video, I gratefully depended on improvised translation by Zhang Zhen.
17. For accounts available in English, see Tse-Tung Chow, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960). For the connection between the May Fourth movement and left-wing cinema, see Leo Ou-fan Lee, "The Tradition of Modern Chinese Cinema: Some Preliminary Explorations and Hypotheses," in Chris Berry, ed., *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1991), 6–20; Ma Ning, "The Textual and Critical Difference of Being Radical: Reconstructing Chinese Leftist Films of the 1930s," *Wide Angle* 11.2 (1989): 22–31; and Chris Berry, "Poisonous Weeds or National Treasures: Chinese Left Cinema in the 1930s," *Jump Cut* 34 (1989): 187–94. Also see Paul Pickowicz, "The Theme of Spiritual Pollution in Chinese Films of the 1930s," *Modern China* 17.1 (January 1991): 38–75. The pioneering, if not entirely reliable, account of this tradition remains Jay Leyda, *Dianying: Electric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972). Also see Scott Meek and Tony Rayns, *Electric Shadows: 45 Years of Chinese Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1980); John Ellis, "Electric Shadows in Italy," *Screen* 23.2 (July/August 1982): 79–83; and Marie-Claire Quiquemelle and Jean-Loup Passek, eds., *Le Cinéma Chinois* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1985).
18. Paul Pickowicz, "Melodramatic Representation and the 'May Fourth' Tradition of Chinese Cinema," in Ellen Widmer and David Wang, eds., *From May Fourth to June Fourth: Fiction and Film in Twentieth-Century China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 308. For a different approach to the melodramatic quality of 1930s Chinese films, see William Rothman, "*The Goddess*: Reflections on Melodrama East and West," in Wimal Dissanayake, ed., *Melodrama and Asian Cinema* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), 59–72. For revisionist approaches to melodrama in the Western tradition, see

Christine Gledhill, ed., *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), especially Gledhill's introduction, "The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation," 5–39.

19. See Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of New Urban Culture in China, 1930–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); and the collection of articles edited by Yingjin Zhang, *Romance, Sexuality, Identity: Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922–1943* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999). The most comprehensive and original account of Shanghai film culture as part of urban modernity can be found in Zhang Zhen, "'An Amorous History of the Silver Screen': Film Culture, Urban Modernity, and the Vernacular Experience in China, 1896–1937," Ph.D. dissertation (University of Chicago, 1998).
20. Accounts of the upheaval and challenges of modernization and migration can be found in Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *Policing Shanghai 1927–1937* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995); Betty Peh-T'i Wei, *Shanghai: Crucible of Modern China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); and Bryna Goodman, *Native Place, City, and Nation: Regional Networks and Identities in Shanghai, 1853–1937* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995). The term "disembedding" for the impact of modernization on social relations is used by Anthony Giddens; see, for instance, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990) and *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).
21. Pickowicz, "Melodramatic Representation," 307.
22. Leyda, *Dianying*, 79.
23. Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 21.
24. Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film: Configurations of Space, Time, and Gender* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 203f.
25. See Kristine Harris, "The New Woman: Image, Subject, and Dissent in 1930s Shanghai Film Culture," *Republican China* 20.2 (1995): 55–79, and a later version of this essay, "*The New Woman* Incident: Cinema, Scandal, and Spectacle in 1935 Shanghai," in *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender*, ed. Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 277–302.
26. See Rothman, "*The Goddess*," 66.
27. See Harris, "*The New Woman* Incident," and documents in Elley, ed., "Peach Blossom Dreams," 137–43.
28. The concept of the "mass ornament" is developed in Kracauer's 1927 essay with the same title; see *The Mass Ornament*, 75–86.
29. See the section on Sun Yu in Elley, ed., "Peach Blossom Dreams," 145–61; "A Gentle Discourse on a Genius: Sun Yu," and Li Cheuk-To, "Eight Films of Sun Yu," tr. Jacob Wong, *Cinemaya: The Asian Film Magazine* II (1991): 53–63; see also Chris Berry, "The Sublimative Text: Sex and Revolution in *Big Road*," *East-West Film Journal* 2.2 (June 1988): 66–86.
30. The young woman's disease resonates not coincidentally with that of Mimi in *La Bohème*, as does the milieu in which the protagonists live, a connection probably mediated by Frank Borzage's film *Seventh Heaven* (1927), which *Daybreak* echoes in, among other things, a remarkable travelling shot that traverses the staircase of the apartment building. See Paolo Cherchi Usai, program note, Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, Pordenone, 1995.
31. This concept of character is central to the classical paradigm; see, for instance, D. Bordwell and K. Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 69, 82. Also see Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), and the special issue on "The Filmic Character" of *Iris: A Journal of Theory on Image and Sound* 24 (Autumn 1997).
32. Of course, there are still the private moments in which the viewer gets a glimpse of her "true" self, as when she releases her pet bird from the cage before being led from the apartment by the police.
33. This moment also resonates with *Dishonored,* in particular a scene earlier in the film in which Dietrich masquerades as a peasant girl, which creates a similar effect of ironic incongruity.
34. Cited in Leyda, *Dianying*, 13. For an interesting allegorical reading of this scene, see Chow, *Primitive Passions* 4–11; also see Ma Ning, "The Textual and Critical Difference of Being Radical," 23.
35. Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 12.

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James L. Neibaur

Chaplin at Essanay

Artist in Transition

The August 31, 1999, release, by Kino on Video, of the 16 two-reelers Chaplin made for Essanay studios in 1915 and 1916 are something of a cause célèbre for enthusiasts of silent cinema. For years the Essanays were available only in soft, murky prints, and many were missing scenes believed lost to decomposition. Film preservationist David Shepard spent three years carefully restoring these films, adding recently rediscovered footage, including newly recorded music, and cleaning up each frame so that we have, for the first time perhaps since their initial release, all of the Chaplin Essanays in pristine condition.

The series has been accessible since the days when 8mm duping allowed condensed versions to be readily available for the toy movie-projector market. However, even respected distributors of 8mm and 16mm films such as Blackhawk never offered particularly good prints. The pre-print material itself was so lacking in quality that making good 8mm or 16mm prints was virtually impossible. Hence, over time, the Essanay period has been certainly the least discussed and most misunderstood of Chaplin's entire cinematic oeuvre. Historically, far more attention has been paid to his more "primitive" Keystone period, during which he created the Tramp character, directed his first films, and learned the basics of performing for the camera.

The Essanay studios were formed by George Spoor and Max Aronson. When he joined them, Chaplin's salary went from the $150 per week he made at Keystone to $1,250 per week and a $10,000 bonus for signing with the company (Sennett had previously offered Chaplin $400 per week to remain at Keystone). Initially apprehensive about the cold, factory-like quality of the production facilities at the Essanay studios in Chicago and Niles, California, Chaplin took solace in the fact that he would now enjoy the greater creative freedom he'd sought in vain at Keystone.

In his first movie at Essanay, appropriately titled *His New Job,* Chaplin immediately experiments with a more innocent presentation of his Tramp. In an early sequence, a woman bends over where Charlie is sitting, and he unwittingly leans towards her and rests his elbow on the woman's derrière. Had this been a Keystone gag, Charlie would have looked directly at the woman, and purposely leaned on her in an aggressive manner. But at Essanay it was presented as an accident, so when the woman gets up and scolds a slightly embarrassed Charlie, the audience responds with a certain sympathy as well as laughter. A simple throwaway gag like this is nevertheless rather important because it suggests—with some immediacy as it appears in the first scene of his first Essanay—that Chaplin wanted "Charlie" to be less of an aggressive knockabout clown and more of a substantial screen character prone to amusing situations.

The first few Essanays were moderately refined reworkings of ideas Chaplin had done at Keystone. *A Night Out,* his second Essanay, recalls *The Rounders,* a Keystone one-reeler that paired him with Roscoe Arbuckle. *In the Park* was a reworking of *Twenty Minutes of Love*; *The Champion* recalls *The Knockout,* another Arbuckle film which had featured Chaplin in a supporting role. While none of these is remarkable in a critical sense, each has its share of brilliant, telling moments that allow us to better appreciate Chaplin's presentation of Charlie as a victim of society whose aggressions are only reactions to the actions of others around him. Sennett had insisted that his Keystone performers keep the comedy moving; at Essanay, Chaplin allows Charlie to stop, observe, and think before reacting.

Film historians nearly always cite Chaplin's sixth Essanay, *The Tramp,* as the most important in terms of adding depth to his characterization and embarking on a distinctly different style. However, it was with his

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The Tramp

fifth Essanay, *A Jitney Elopement,* that Chaplin goes beyond mere nuances or refinement of Keystone situations to present an original idea that is far more subtle and substantial than his earlier work. Nearly all the humor in the film is quite delicate. The essential plot features a rich father pairing his daughter (Edna Purviance) with a count whom she has never met. Edna already loves the vagabond Charlie, who also pines for her. Charlie poses as the Count in order to fool the father and win Edna's hand. He is invited to dinner but, while trying to appear refined, unwittingly cuts his plate instead of his meat, attempts to hide the fact that his meat is too tough to cut, slices a loaf of bread in a spiral fashion which leaves the loaf still intact (an old gag from his music hall days), and casually drops many lumps of sugar into his hot coffee. Upon the arrival of the actual Count, the audience feels sorry that Charlie will soon be found out. We have an emotional interest in this character which goes beyond mere amusement.

Chaplin followed *A Jitney Elopement* with *The Tramp*. Charlie's first appearance in *The Tramp* is decidedly different than it had been in any of the films thus far. There is no spring in his step, and his waddle seems more like a painful limp. He is a little man whose meager food portions are stolen by other tramps, forcing him to eat field grass for nourishment. But to keep the film from becoming too heavily dramatic, Chaplin has Charlie carefully salt the grass before devouring it. It is a clever, amusing piece of business, and also presents Charlie as trying to maintain some dignity. The tramps who rob him are a counterpoint to his character: they are angry, aggressive rule-breakers. Charlie is their victim.

The Tramp was the film that captured the hearts of audiences; a film that had the necessary wild slapstick, but that also incorporated the equally popular melodramatics that tapped into other emotions. By the time he finished *The Tramp,* Chaplin's formula was established and thus further honed with each successive production. *Work* is especially significant in that it contains perhaps the broadest slapstick of all the Essanay productions, yet still is far more refined in its presentation than anything Chaplin had done at Keystone. And while a Keystone production about paperhangers would be reduced to flying buckets of paste by the end of the first reel, this Essanay film is more interested in the visuals of cinema, especially in the opening sequence, which features the diminutive Charlie pulling an enormous wagon filled with debris.

The Bank depicts another situation where Charlie is broken-hearted over his love for Edna. It ends with his note and bouquet being rejected by her. And while the film contains a good deal of wild slapstick and solid

laughs, the melodrama of the underlying theme is an interesting portent to the pathos that would appear far more frequently when Chaplin began making features. *A Woman* presents Chaplin's final appearance in drag: Charlie has to disguise himself as a lady in order to defy Edna's father and see her. *A Night at the Show* is the most complete cinematic adaptation of any of Chaplin's old music hall sketches, with Charlie playing two parts: a pretentious tuxedo-clad theatergoer and a rowdy working-class lout cheering lustily from the balcony. *Police* is one of the the most important Essanays in the Kino collection in that it is now available for the first time the way Chaplin intended it. Chaplin left Essanay for Mutual shortly after completing it, and the studio reedited the film. Chaplin's original cut is restored in Kino's print.

Burlesque on Carmen may very well be the most important reconstruction in the Kino collection. It was completed immediately prior to Chaplin's departure from Essanay, and the company decided to transform the finished two-reeler into a four-reeler by adding discarded material and shooting a few new scenes under the direction of Leo White. Chaplin's clever parody of Cecil B. DeMille's popular screen version of *Carmen* was stretched to a confusing, protracted failure. Chaplin sued in court, but lost when it was judged that the studio had the right to release its product as they wished.

For the first time, *Burlesque on Carmen* is available in its original two-reel edit as Chaplin intended, David Shepard basing his reconstruction on court documents provided by the Chaplin archives. For those who have seen the four-reel version, the difference in the reconstruction is more than merely cutting it down to a tighter two-reels. It is really a completely different film, much more clever and interesting, and a dead-on satire of the DeMille production.

Chaplin's final Essanay is not really a Chaplin film at all. *Triple Trouble* was released by Essanay as a "new" Chaplin movie in 1918, a full three years after he'd left the studio. Capitalizing on his massive popularity, Essanay gathered discarded portions from *Police,* an alternate ending for *Work,* and footage from an abandoned feature-length effort entitled *Life*. The only thing worth recommending about *Triple Trouble* is the opportunity to see scenes from the abandoned *Life* project, which would otherwise have never been available.These scenes, and of course all these Essanay films, reveal the details and progession of the the transition between Charlie the comedian and Chaplin the filmmaker.

James L. Neibaur is a film historian, author of four books, and a contributor of film-related essays to the *Encyclopaedia Brittanica*.

PLANET HONG KONG
POPULAR CINEMA AND THE ART OF ENTERTAINMENT
DAVID BORDWELL

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Reviews

The Straight Story

Director: David Lynch. Producers: Mary Sweeney, Neal Edelstein. Writers: John Roach, Sweeney. Cinematographer: Freddie Francis. Editor: Sweeney. Production designer: Jack Fisk. Music: Angelo Badalamenti. Buena Vista.

The Straight Story begins a lot like a David Lynch film, specifically like *Blue Velvet*: first we see a dreamy montage of slow-motion scenes from a small-town, middle-American Eden (cinematographer Freddie Francis filling in for Norman Rockwell and composer Angelo Badalamenti for Aaron Copland), and then the camera drifts down to a neatly mown suburban yard. A fat woman with goggles and a tanning reflector is sunning herself on a lawn chair, blindly groping for Hostess Sno-balls on a nearby plate—a characteristically Lynchian figure, the Felliniesque grotesque next door. Nothing happens for a Lynchianly long time. The woman runs out of Sno-balls and gets up to go in for more. Because we know we are watching a David Lynch film, there is a certain expectant air—that ominous, low-register thrum of imminent catastrophe. Then we hear a cry and thud from inside—recalling the stroke that felled Jeffrey Beaumont's father and began *Blue Velvet*'s dark adventure. And then, this being a David Lynch film, we await our inevitable descent into the black and crawly underbelly of this overbright world.

I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

That which is crooked cannot be made straight; and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.

Ecclesiastes 1:14-15

Which, as everyone by now knows, never happens. The most famous thing about *The Straight Story* is that it is rated G. (Who could have imagined, after seeing *Blue Velvet* in 1986, that we would ever see the credit "Walt Disney Pictures Presents a Film by David Lynch"?) It's been described by critics as sweet, simple, and sentimental; authentic, buccolic, and unironic. Its hero, Alvin Straight, is a genuinely good man, honest and direct, dispensing advice and helping folks when he can—a guy we can admire. And, even more incredibly, almost every character he encounters on his odyssey is also honest and friendly and helpful and just basically decent. There is none of the ugly sex and violence, the lurid, nightmarish surrealism, that lie at the heart of other David Lynch films. It appears, however amazingly, to be a film devoid of darkness or duplicity, without so much as a single cuss word.

Anthony Lane of *The New Yorker* dismissed *The Straight Story* as a "comic coda to *Lost Highway*." Although the film is clearly not comic at its heart, it does, like its predecessor, use one story to mask another, more sinister, one. *Lost Highway*'s protagonist Fred represses all memory of having murdered his wife in a jealous rage; he only glimpses himself howling over her dismembered corpse on grainy videotape, and, in the film's second half, re-imagines his story as a pulpy film noir with himself as the unwitting dupe of his wife (reincarnated as a femme fatale)—instead of as the villain he truly is. (As he tells two detectives in the film's first half, "I like to remember things my own way.") Similarly, Alvin Straight never brings himself to tell the straight story of his own past; he tells, instead, incomplete and disguised versions of it to the strangers he meets, hears echoes of it in the stories they tell him, and sees distorted reenactments of it in one scene after another.

The real story of *The Straight Story* turns out not to be very straightforward at all, but involuted and hidden—buried, as in *Lost Highway,* within the ostensible narrative like a repressed memory. This movie is about how a mean drunk named Alvin Straight lost his daughter's children to the state because he let one of them get burned in a fire. This is the only way the film makes sense as a unified whole, as anything other than the meandering picaresque most reviewers thought it was. Alvin Straight is riding his mower with its wagon all those hundreds of miles along highway shoulders not on an errand of forgiveness, but as an ordeal of atonement. There is darkness here beneath the bright autumn colors, and evil concealed in Alvin's heart. There is the history of a family destroyed by alcoholism and abuse. There is fire and death.

Is this all really unexpected? *The Straight Story* is a David Lynch film, after all.

That a story is seldom truly "straight" is one of the defining insights of literary modernism; writers like James Joyce and Henry James took the unreliability of first-person narrators to new heights of self-consciousness and, sometimes, new depths of self-deception. And yet this mistrust of the ostensible "story," by now instinctive in reading literature, seems not to have penetrated criticism of the superficially more

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transparent medium of film. The title of David Lynch's latest is not just an obvious pun but a warning and a test; it warns us not to be deceived by appearances—in this case, by an ingenuous claim of forthrightness, a frank demeanor, or an honest face.

The story that Alvin tells of his own past, piece by piece, to the various people he meets is full of conspicuous gaps and contradictions. Take his story about his hard drinking: that he'd developed "a mournful taste for alcohol" during the war in France and became a mean drunk, but was helped to give up drinking by a preacher after he got home. Or his story about his daughter Rose: that she had four children, but that the state, misinterpreting her speech (or neurological) impediment as evidence that she was an unfit mother, took them away when one of them was burned in a fire. Or Alvin's account of his falling-out with his brother Lyle: the one time he's directly asked what was at issue, he vaguely waves the question off ("anger . . . vanity . . ."). Or even his answering "I did" when Lyle, at the film's end, asks if he drove his mower "just to see" him. None of these stories is quite straight. In fact, none of them stands up to much scrutiny at all.

If Alvin gave up drinking shortly after his return from World War II, why did drink figure in the fight that estranged him from Lyle ten years ago? Why doesn't Rose at least get to visit her children, or talk to them? And why do we learn so little about Alvin's breach with his brother? The fact that the details of what is ostensibly the central conflict in the film are left so conspicuously blank suggests that we ought to ask what else the conflict might involve. What *is* the real reason Alvin's making this trip?

Alvin first tells a small part of his story to the pregnant runaway who shares his campfire. It's the story of what happened to Rose's children: "Someone else was supposed to be watchin' them, and there was a fire, and her second boy got burned real bad." Note the vague references —"someone else"—and passive constructions—"there was a fire" and "got burned." As he speaks, we see a series of dissolves from one allusive image of abandonment and emptiness to another: the bare yellow wall of Alvin and Rose's house with a flyswatter hanging from a nail; a child's ball rolling slowly down the sidewalk; Rose's wistful face reflected in the window glass; cigarette smoke curling in the air. Alvin shares this piece of his past to impress upon the girl how much her own family must miss her: "There's not a day goes by that she doesn't pine for those kids." But Alvin's story is only tangentially relevant to the girl's predicament. He's leaving something out.

Kenneth Turan of the *L. A. Times* calls Alvin "the Ann Landers of the Open Road," who "seems to know just how to solve the problems of the people, young and old, he meets by the side of the road." But the advice he gives the runaway has more to do with his own regrets and wishes than with her dilemma. Here's Richard Corliss's account, from *Time,* of the parable he offers her:

> The old man tells her that he used to give each of his kids a stick and say, "You break that." Of course they could. Then he'd tell them to tie some sticks in a bundle and try to break that. And they couldn't. "Then I'd say, 'That bundle—that's a family.'" The next morning, the old man wakes up to find the girl gone, with the hint that she'll be returning home. On the ground is a bundle of sticks with a bow tied around it.

Well, this is nice. But it should be pointed out that Alvin's quaint metaphor for strength through unity, the

The patriarch (Richard Farnsworth) and his daughter (Sissy Spacek)

bundle of sticks tied together, is not his own invention. The "fasces," a bound bundle of rods containing an ax with the blade protruding forward, was an object borne ceremonially before Roman magistrates as an emblem of imperial power. The term "fascism" is derived from this emblem, a symbol of invincible strength through monolithic solidarity and submission to a single will—typically that of a tyrannical patriarch who ends up getting people killed. Even if you tie a pretty bow around that, it's still ugly.

But, more explicitly, this scene is also an allusion to *Ran,* Akira Kurosawa's adaptation of Shakespeare's tragedy of a senescent patriarch and warrior. Hidetora, the Great Lord of the Ichimonji clan, uses exactly the same demonstration to instruct his three sons in the value of filial unity: he gives them each an arrow to break, which they do easily, and then challenges them to try to break a bundle of three arrows. Except that Hidetora's youngest son angrily smashes the bundle across his knee and calls his father on his blatant hypocrisy. "You've spilled an ocean of blood," he cries. "You showed no mercy, no pity. We, too, are children of this age, weaned on strife and blood. We are your sons, yet you count on our fidelity—in our eyes, that makes you a fool, a senile old fool." Alvin Straight, unlike Hidetora, goes unchallenged when he mouths platitudes about loyalty and peace that are utterly at odds with his own history of violence and betrayal.

Alvin's performance as patriarch of his own clan doesn't seem to have matched his rhetoric about the unbreakability of the family bond. His own family *has* been sundered. He hasn't spoken to his brother for ten years. His daughter Rose's children have been taken from her. The rest of his children, like Hidetora's, don't seem to have taken the lesson of the stick-breaking game straight to heart; there's no evidence of any contact between Alvin and any of Rose's six surviving siblings. (We overhear Rose on the phone discussing Alvin and Lyle's feud with someone, possibly a family member, but Alvin himself stays off the line.) Where has all his family gone? Dispersed across the country, like so many American families—or driven apart, like the Ichimonji brothers, by the divisive example of their father's cruelty?

It does not seem like too broad a generalization to say that families in David Lynch films are not happy families. They are more likely to be incestuous and violent, twisted or torn apart by repressed memories and unspeakable secrets: Fred in *Lost Highway* murders his wife; Marietta Pace in *Wild at Heart* is complicit in her husband's death and tries to seduce her daughter's boyfriend; Leland Palmer molests and kills his daughter Laura in *Twin Peaks*; in *Blue Velvet* Frank Booth obviously (and Jeffrey Beaumont, less obviously) has basic Oedipal issues to work through. And let it suffice to say of *Eraserhead* that Henry Spencer's dinner with his girlfriend Mary's family, the Xes, is among the least pleasant of all the strained and unpleasant family dinner scenes ever filmed (possibly excepting the one in *Fire Walk with Me*), and that the nuclear family unit formed by Henry and Mary and their infant is also less than traditionally strong and nurturing. Given all that, we would be willing marks if we weren't skeptical about any family-values platitudes uttered by one of Lynch's characters, or suspicious of a Lynchian family that *didn't* conceal an internecine crime at its heart.

David Lynch tells the ugly truth in *The Straight Story* not in words but in images, powerfully sugges-

tive visual metaphors. In the film's only scene of genuine action or suspense, Alvin Straight almost loses control of his makeshift mower/wagon coming downhill into a small town where the local fire department is conducting a training exercise on a burning abandoned house. As the old man desperately brakes and grapples with the wheel, hurtling faster and faster downhill, out of control, the camera cuts back and forth in a blur between his frantic face and the blazing house nearby. The high scream of the mower's overstrained engine and the engulfing roar of the fire become one terrifying noise. Anthony Lane shrugs this scene off as one of Lynch's "bursts of calculated strangeness"—those irrepressibly wacky trademark idiosyncrasies popping up again in a film where they're only distracting. But this burning house is not just a surreal non sequitur; it's one of the central images in the film. This scene functions as a flashback to the earlier fire, the one in which Alvin's grandchildren were burned. Alvin's face, bathed in sweat and flickering orange with firelight, and his eyes, bulging and rolling in his head like a frightened animal's, express a terror that transcends his immediate situation. When intercut with those quick, jarring shots of the blazing house, the real object of that terror is unmistakable. *Alvin* is the unnamed "someone" who was supposed to be watching Rose's kids. He let his grandson get burned. He caused his daughter's children to be taken away by the state. After he manages to stop his tractor, he sits panting and shaking in terror, staring at nothing, the burning house clearly framed in the background. He is trembling not just in reaction to his near-accident, but in an abreaction to that original trauma—another time when Alvin Straight lost control and events took on their own scary, unstoppable momentum.

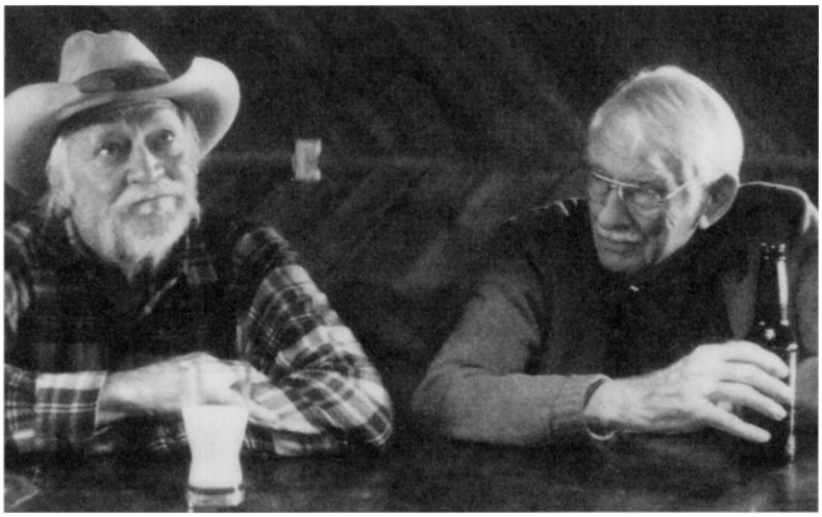
This underlying, untold story makes sense of his whole journey, uniting episodes that have no other narrative connection and nothing else in common: the burning house, a woman hitting a deer on a highway, war stories told in a bar. These seemingly random meetings and tangential tales—Lynch's "bursts of calculated strangeness"—are all integral, each one another clue to the straight story. The situations Alvin encounters are reiterations of his own crimes and failures, confrontations with his own denial.

The driver hitting the deer is no self-indulgent directorial digression but a crucial episode. Again, as in the scene of the burning house, the camera focuses on Alvin's reaction, zooming in on his face in an almost subliminally rapid, staccato succession of increasingly close shots as he witnesses the offscreen accident that we only hear. Again, his horror is not just reaction but abreaction; he's hearing an echo of his own accident. Alvin pulls out his canes and hobbles up to a car that has slaughtered a deer in the road, and finds the driver hysterical, weeping and shrieking. She's tried everything, she explains—honking the horn, rolling down the window and banging her hand on the door, even playing Public Enemy real loud. That's thirteen deer she's hit in the last seven weeks. "And I *love* deer!" she blurts out before getting disgustedly back into her car and peeling out.

This is a strange episode, its absurdist comedy seeming false and hollow in contrast to the bleakness of the surrounding landscape and the ceaseless sound of the wind ruffling through the dry grass. This driver isn't telling a straight story, either. Although she rails against the perverse luck that keeps throwing sacrificial victims at her, her killing streak is her own fault. Sure, deer do have a regrettable way of jumping in front of cars on country back roads—but *thirteen* in *seven weeks?* During the *daytime?* That's more than bad luck. The fact is, she was driving way too fast; her car veered around Alvin's rig just as he was riding by a NO PASSING ZONE sign. The reason she keeps hitting deer is that she's a reckless driver. "Where do they *come* from?" she demands, looking helplessly out at the few sparse, bare trees in the landscape. But these deaths aren't being visited upon her by any cruel, arbitrary fate. She is Alvin's counterpart in her continuing inability to take responsibility for the terrible (and not unpredictable) consequences of a heedless urgency. After she screeches out of sight, there is a long, mournful shot of Alvin standing there in the road, thoughtfully nudging the deer's limp head with the toe of his boot.

In the very next shot we see him that evening cooking venison over his fire, glancing uneasily over his shoulder at an inexplicable herd of statues of deer who seem to be watching him. This is not just a cheap sight gag; these stolidly haunting presences represent the accusing memory of his human victims. Although there are about a dozen statues in the field, the shot when Alvin looks back at them is framed so that we see four of them "staring" at him; Rose, we'll remember, had four children. In the next scene, the deer's antlers have been mounted like a hood ornament on the front of his rig, where they remain visible for the rest of the film. They're particularly prominent in the frame after he's almost lost control near the burning house.

Animal trophies figure prominently in Lynch's work as symbols of casual human violence. Scarcely an interior in *Twin Peaks* is without a stuffed carcass; the whole town is densely populated by the hunted and mounted. The series' preoccupation with the fierce



Veterans tell stories (Farnsworth and Verlyn Heller)

passions that possess parents and claim their children as victims leaves little doubt as to the meaning of so much taxidermy: it symbolizes human hungers, both carnivorous and carnal. Alvin Straight, from what we can see, is exclusively carnivorous, subsisting solely on processed meat products. And as for carnality, he did father fourteen children—about as many deer as that woman's killed in the last few weeks. Most likely, it was another of Alvin's appetites—his "taste for liquor"—that got his grandson burned. The antlers are a token of his past sins and a symbol of his new penitence. (It's not incidental, either, that the lawnmower he needs to make his journey is a John *Deere,* its logo the silhouette of a rampant buck.) Alvin's trophy alludes to that same central disaster—an innocent creature harmed by the carelessness of someone who claimed to love it, who couldn't understand why this sort of thing kept happening to him.

Yes, *kept* happening—because, as we learn later, that fire wasn't the first time Alvin was at fault in a tragedy. Sitting in a bar with another old veteran, Alvin reveals that as a sniper in the war he accidentally shot and killed one of his own men, a Polish kid from Milwaukee named Kotz. Artists have often used pastoral settings to disguise commentaries on the corruption and betrayals of civil life (sometimes, most famously in Virgil's *Eclogues,* on the troubled fates of aged soldiers). In a pre-millennial year that saw more than its share of triumphalist rhetoric about the "painful but necessary job well done," David Lynch shows us memories of the Second World War which refuse to paper over the disillusionments of the postwar period. For Alvin, "homed" to rural Laurens, Iowa, what followed was a lifetime of secret remorse that expressed itself in drunkenness and cruelty, eventually estranging him from his family. The original trauma, an honest but fatal mistake, brought on the hard drinking that led to later, less forgivable, lapses of judgment.

Even the war stories these two old vets swap refer back to the unspoken story of the film—the fire. The tale the other vet tells is about all his buddies being killed, burned alive, by an incendiary bomb. We actually hear the explosion as he remembers, faint with the distance of decades—another echo of Alvin's own catastrophe. It is significant that the story Alvin does bring himself to share in response is a confession of long-repressed guilt, especially that he describes the man he killed as "a little fella." Groping to find a way to begin, he awkwardly repeats the phrase, emphasizing it—"He was a *little* fella,"—as though it explains what he's really trying to convey. (We shouldn't forget Alvin's horrified memory of the German adolescents—"moon-faced boys"—it was his job to kill.) Though harrowing enough, even this story is an evasion, another disguised allusion to his own grandchild, "a little fella" whose side Alvin was supposed to be on, someone else he was supposed to be watching out for, another one of his own whom he hurt without meaning to.

In this same scene, Alvin admits that he came back from the war an alcoholic. "I was *mean,*" he says. But, he says, a minister helped him "put some distance between [him]self and the bottle," as though he had gone on the wagon a long time ago. Later, however, talking to a priest in a cemetery, he acknowledges that liquor was a catalyst in his falling out with Lyle. The apparent inconsistency between these two stories makes us wonder what really occasioned Alvin's reform. The clearest glimpse we ever get of the man Alvin Straight has been all his life—quick-tempered, impulsive, and violent—is after he's been brought back from his first, failed attempt to leave town. He deliberately fetches his shotgun, takes it out in back of his house, aims, and executes his old, broken-down mower—which explodes into flames.

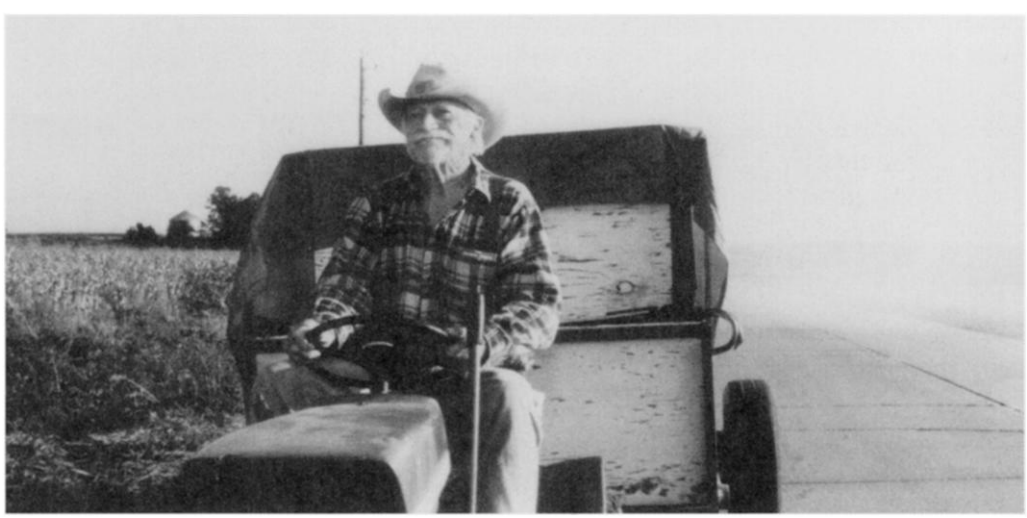
Images of fire recur throughout Lynch's films: a desert cabin implodes in a fiery cloud in *Lost Highway*; in *Blue Velvet* the monstrous image of Jeffrey smacking Dorothy Vallens dissolves in a sheet of fire; billowing flames fill the credits and gigantic flaring match heads punctuate the scenes of *Wild at Heart*. Also in *Wild at Heart,* Lula is never quite told the straight story about the fire that killed her father, the memory of which still makes her shudder: It was deliberately set by her mother's lover, Santos. It's already been intimated that there was more to the fire in *The Straight Story* than Alvin lets on. We see fire again and again in the film, not only in the conflagrations of the house and mower

but in domesticated forms—in the campfires he builds every night, in the bonfire at the bikers' camp, and, of course, in the glowing ends of his cherished cigars. Isn't it implied that Alvin may have *set* the fire, passing out with a lighted Swisher Sweet, that burned his daughter's child?

The straight story of Alvin's life would seem to have gone more like this: World War II turned the strengths of his rural upbringing—his patience as a hunter, his skill as a marksman, his commitment to protecting his brothers-in-arms—into the makings of a tragedy and a source of shame. The psychological damage to him was permanent, only fermented and made more potent by his alcoholism and denial. Traumatized far beyond his own awareness of the damage, Alvin Straight lived out the next 40 years—his entire adult lifetime—as an abusive drunk who impregnated his wife fourteen times, injured one of his grandchildren through his negligence and caused four of them to be taken into the custody of the state, alienated his brother, and ended up living in near-isolation with his damaged, now childless daughter in a small, lonely, too-quiet house. This reconstruction, if even close to correct, makes new, more somber sense of Alvin's signature line (singled out by some critics as mawkish screenwriting): "The worst part of bein' old is remembering when you was young."

Seeing Alvin's journey as one of atonement rather than of forgiveness is the only way to make sense of its strange, self-imposed restrictions. Alvin won't accept an offered ride when his mower breaks down, and politely but obstinately refuses not once but three times to enter his benefactors' house even just to use their phone. (Like another old cowboy who almost killed one of his own, John Wayne's Ethan Edwards at the end of *The Searchers,* Alvin only stands in the doorway, denying himself the comforts of domestic civilization.) At night, camped out in their back yard, he watches wistfully as the lights go out in their windows. His trip is not just the necessary means of getting to his brother's house; it's an ordeal ritual, its rigors and privations rigidly maintained as a form of self-flagellation.

Alvin has undertaken this journey not just because his brother has had a stroke and may not live much longer, but because he knows he's not going to live much longer himself. He tells his daughter the doctor said he was "gonna live to be a hundred," but this is far from the straight story. What the doctor told him was that his hips were going, he was in the early stages of emphysema, his circulation was failing, and his diet was bad. "If you don't make some changes quickly," he concluded, "there'll be some serious consequences." But it's pretty clear that Alvin Straight isn't going to be making any changes; he's petrified just looking at the medical equipment in the clinic, and insists that he's not going to pay for an operation, or have X-rays taken, or even use a walker. And for the rest of the film he keeps right on smoking his Swisher Sweets and eating raw wieners and Braunschweiger. He's a stubborn man, as he admits, stubborn even in self-destruction. Our glimpse of Alvin's unclothed body in the clinic—wrinkled, swollen, and sagging, speckled with prominent moles—is, finally, the thing itself, unveiled, that David Lynch has portrayed before in so many nightmarish versions, from the "baby" in *Eraserhead* to the piteously malformed Elephant Man to the spectacularly obese and pustulant Baron Harkonnen in *Dune*: all the horror and glory of imprisonment in flesh—the inevitability of age, disease, and dissolution.



Significantly, Alvin makes his pilgrimage in the autumn. He and his daughter listen to the far-off roar of a grain elevator the night he announces his intention to make the trip. "It's . . . harvest time," she says. The agricultural machines we see in those sweeping aerial views are threshers and harvesters. Harvest is when the world begins to die around us, and it is also when we reap what we have sown. Alvin knows this trip will be his last long haul; his quest is not for his brother's redemption but for his own. On the last night of his journey, before finally rejoining Lyle, he sets his camp in a cemetery.

Pilgrimages are not fashioned as gifts to our earthly siblings; they are abasements of the soul before the almighty. (Maybe Alvin's chosen to make this offering to Lyle because, as he tells the bickering twins who repair his mower, "Your brother knows better than anyone else *who* you are and *what* you are.") And, although often prompted by premonitions of mortality and fired by sincere repentance, pilgrimages are not guaranteed success. *The Straight Story* begins and ends with an elegiac image of the starry sky—the same image that attends John Merrick's last sleep in *The Elephant Man*. But the stars are not an unambiguous image of serenity, of making peace with the past and coming to rest, as Alvin hopes to do. There's no divine grace or forgiveness in evidence for him, not even the vision of maternal tenderness granted the suffocating Merrick. Alvin's endlessly expanding starscape could just as easily signify vast emptiness and indifference, or the absurdity of human striving in the face of unsurpassable sublimity, or the profound gulf between human yearnings and any answering assurance. The point here is not to supply an answer to the open-ended question posed by this image, but to explicitly acknowledge that it remains open-ended.

When has there ever been an unambiguously happy ending in a Lynch film, anyway? When John Merrick is urged to stand up and acknowledge the applause of London society at the theater, how different is that from his being prodded with a stick and ordered to stand and exhibit himself for gawkers at the freak show? The image of his mother in the stars, "the face of an angel" assuring him that "nothing dies," is a beatific deathbed dream. Is normalcy really restored, and corruption fully exposed, in the idyllic denouement of *Blue Velvet,* when we see Jeffrey's father returned to good health and the two young lovers' families lunching together? And are we really supposed to accept at face value the intervention of Glinda, the Good Witch of the North, and the last-minute reconciliation of Sailor and Lula at the end of *Wild at Heart*? Lyle is obviously moved beyond words by Alvin's effort, but *The Straight Story* deliberately leaves uncertain whether he forgives his brother. Alvin's journey itself, and whatever hard-earned glimpses of earthly grace it may have given him—a replenishing thunderstorm over an Iowa cornfield, children waving from the back of a pickup truck, late afternoon sunlight flickering through autumn leaves—will have to have been enough.

Questions of forgiveness—whether it is possible and what it really means—are also raised by Alvin's relationship with Rose. At first the two seem naïve and sweet—an eccentric, aging father-and-daughter couple living together and looking after each other. But in the light of the buried backstory, the history of betrayal and hurt between them, we might see instead a stunted and bereaved Cordelia alongside a middle-American

Lear. Rose is spending her middle age caring for a father who lost her children to the state. Their life together does seem tender and innocent, but it's also lonely and terribly sad. Rose, her speech interrupted by abrupt glottal stops, seems just as withholding and unable to speak about the truth as Alvin. She occupies herself building bird houses, protective shelters for helpless creatures, and painting them with the same brightly colored trim we see on her own house. How are we to judge this household? Does it display heartwarming familial loyalty and forgiveness—an example of the sort of solidarity Alvin preaches—or pathetic codependency and denial? Lynch isn't saying.

In his essay on *Lost Highway,* "David Lynch Keeps His Head," collected in *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again,* David Foster Wallace argues that Lynch has alienated both critics and audiences because he confounds the conventional, reassuring dichotomy between good and evil that most American films foist on us. Lynch's protagonists, he insists, are never just good or evil but always, discomfitingly, both. Just look back at them: the naïve mechanic Pete in *Lost Highway,* menaced by his mistress's gangster boyfriend, is actually a jealous husband who's killed his wife; the angelic Laura Palmer in *Fire Walk with Me* is also a coke whore; the youthful rebels Lula and Sailor in *Wild at Heart* are in danger of becoming the corrupt elders they're trying to flee; the college-boy detective Jeffrey Beaumont in *Blue Velvet* is secretly as perverted and sadistic as the "sick" Frank Booth. When Doctor Treves in *The Elephant Man,* who both helps and exploits poor deformed John Merrick, finally asks himself, "Am I a good man? Or a bad man?" there is, in answer, only a fade to black.

Alvin Straight, like Treves, is in the end one of Lynch's more self-aware protagonists—having come through the flames of his own anger and guilt, he knows what he is capable of. But in his heart he is no different from the rest of them. Yes, as we can see from everything he does and says, Alvin is at last what we like to think of as a "good" man, offering kindness and wisdom to the people he meets. But we also know, from what he has done before and cannot quite bring himself to say, that he's a son of a bitch. His "goodness" is not exactly a delusion, like Fred's, or naïvete, like Jeffrey's, or hypocrisy, like Treves's; it's harder, more complicated, maybe more authentic—the kindness of a man who knows he is capable of great meanness, the wisdom that comes only from remorse over past recklessness, the knowledge that light is inseparable from shadow.

The Straight Story is genuinely poignant and moving, in a way that, say, *Lost Highway* certainly isn't. But to call the film "sentimental," or discontinuous with Lynch's previous work, is simply to misunderstand it. Far from abandoning grotesques and eerie atmospherics for a fantasy of some middle America where folks are just as honest and decent as they seem, David Lynch's portrait of crooked Alvin Straight, and of the many crooked miles he's traveled, reveals the deep psychological complexity—that "vanity and vexation of spirit"—in any human life, and the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of attaining any sure atonement in it.

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Tesis

Director/writer: Alejandro Amenábar. Producers: José Luis Cuerda, Emiliano Otegui. Cinematographer: Hans Burmann. Art Director: Wolfgang Burmann. Music: Amenábar, Mariano Marín. Las Producciones del Escorpión S.L.

Tesis, written and directed in 1995 by the precocious 23-year-old Alejandro Amenábar, garnered seven out of eight possible Goya awards (the Spanish equivalent of the Oscar), including best new director and best original screenplay. (It is not available on video, but is shown in film festivals with English subtitles.) Its opening scene renders an ordinary urban tableau—passengers seated on a Madrid metro—sinister and unsettling. The train is at a standstill, lights flicker, concerned voices murmur, and then the conductor announces that the metro is stalled due to an accident that has severed a man in half. "Don't look at the tracks!" he urges the exiting crowds. Nonetheless, Angela (Ana Torrent), the protagonist, quickly detaches herself from the crowd to peer down at the track with a conflicted desire to see, and a horror of seeing, whatever horror lies below.

This prelude presents *Tesis*'s concerns with exploring the intersection of voyeuristic desire, violence, abjection, and spectatorial gender dynamics, as well as its meditation upon the complicity between viewer and footage viewed, between media consumers and images generated and disseminated. At stake in *Tesis* will also be the irreconcilable tension between the visceral desire for and valorization of the "real" that drives the viewer of pornography, and its darker if apocryphal counterpart, snuff, and the ideological opacity of all cinematic images, no matter how illusionistically rendered. We learn that Angela is writing a master's thesis on media violence, for which she seeks the help first of her advisor Figueroa (Miguel Picazo) in gaining access to the university's film archives, and then of her classmate, Chema (Feíe Martínez). Chema, a misfit splatter-film aficionado, agrees to show Angela his stash of violent tapes, a combination of horror films and footage of real-life disaster that appears to reference the *Faces of Death* video series, even as she protests "It's for my work" and "I don't want to see." These words paradoxically affirm the very fascination with abjection that she would disavow, an unpleasant truth that refracts between the film's protagonists and us, its spectators.

After their conversation Figueroa unexpectedly disappears, and Angela searches the building, to discover, in the university's subterranean viewing room, her professor dead beneath a screen flickering with audiovisual snow—having suffered a heart attack induced by the unspeakable images of the snuff film he had been watching. She steals the video and plays it in the living room of the bourgeois Madrid apartment that she shares with her family. As with the opening scene of the film, banality and horror collide. Before Angela's transfixed gaze, a young woman tied to a chair screams "No!" as a man attacks her. Angela blocks her ears, unable to stand what seem to be authentic human screams. She takes the video to Chema and as he watches it, he recounts its contents—while she experiences *Tesis*' leitmotif conflict: she cannot look but must look. It is a reaction which mirrors our spectatorial response. For when Angela finally does look, the object of her gaze is withheld from our frustrated view, renewing our consciousness of our own complicity in craving a glimpse.

That cinematic images lack transparency, that they are only ever mediated by the dynamic, shifting subjectivities of the viewer and of the filmmaker, who cuts up and reconfigures "reality" to his own taste, is emphasized as Chema and Angela analyze the footage to try to discover who filmed it. Amenábar highlights the tension between the craving for the real that motivates the consumer of snuff (and pornography in general), and the impossibility of any film's perfect meshing with this fetishized reality. Unlike illusionistic narratives, where the spectator willingly suspends his disbelief to enjoy the tale told, in pornography the paroxysmal moment of extremity caught on film takes on a special urgency.[1] The filmic mise-en-scène seems to coincide perfectly with the crime scene in an "ideal" fusion of image with the reality that it purports to render: a garage, a woman tied to a chair, a man assaulting her in incrementally brutal ways. Yet Chema is able to discern that the footage has been cut and spliced so as to eliminate the man's face, and that the faint horizontal lines that mar the image are specific to the XT-500 video camera.

Angela as investigator (the Spanish *investigar* encompasses both "to conduct research" and "to inves-

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tigate"), with Chema as her sidekick, is then situated as a cinematic subject by a point-of-view shot that reveals her to be searching the university cafeteria for the incriminating video camera. She spies the machine in the hands of a classmate, Bosco (Eduardo Noriega), who is playfully filming his girlfriend Yolanda. Yolanda's smiling image on video wavers as Bosco, visible only from the back, films her, while Angela watches both of them with a mixture of curiosity and dread. Are these amateur images a loving homage to a college girlfriend, or a murderer's homing in on his next victim? This configuration of male "director," face hidden from viewer, and vulnerable female subject displayed on screen resonates uncannily with the snuff film set-up, but Angela cannot be sure, so she follows him.

Amenábar wields an aesthetic of rupture and fragmentation to superb effect as Angela's tracking of Bosco shifts into flight from him after he notices her and starts to pursue her in his turn; the familiar university environs become defamiliarized. As the sinister Bosco now chases after her, Angela stumbles into a labyrinth of empty corridors rendered in choppy, hallucinatory angles. She drops some newspaper clippings about the snuff victim, and when Bosco catches up with her, he manipulates her into pretending that she's researching the murder for a journalistic report and she ends up having to agree to film him for this project.

Amenábar thus complicates Angela's position, disrupting the patriarchal dynamics that characterize traditional horror films. While she remains a potential victim until the end, she is also the smart, determined investigator, the detective. In the dance of flight and pursuit that she will perform with Bosco throughout the film, she literally and figuratively maintains her subjectivity against the impulse that would erase it. Carol Clover's re-reading of horror films is useful in this context. She problematizes an understanding of the horror film genre as reducible to misogynist representations of male depredation and female victimization.[2] She considers the female survivor, the "Final Girl," as a resourceful figure who breaks with clichéd, essentialist representations of femininity, which permits both male and female adolescent viewers to identify with her as she goes on to foil her monstrous foe. Angela, with her lithe body clad in unisex jeans and loose jackets, her short hair, unmade-up face, and serious analytical intent, seems a likely candidate for Final Girl status.

Further, Ana Torrent, the child actress who starred in the work of acclaimed directors Carlos Saura and Víctor Erice, possesses an iconic status within Franco-era and Spanish cinema of the transition to democracy. As Marsha Kinder has discussed, in films such as *Cría cuervos* (*The Secrets of Ana*, 1975) and *El espíritu de la colmena* (*Spirit of the Beehive*, 1973), the child protagonist Ana repeatedly challenges the perspectives presented as natural by a patriarchal, Francoist social-political order.[3] She enacts Oedipal rebellions within rigidly hierarchical family structures and challenges patriarchal preeminence with her own marginalized but fiercely imagined personal vision, which the directors render through POV shots so as to situate the little girl as a subversive subject rather than an oppressed female object. Although explicit referencing of fascist oppression is absent in *Tesis*, Torrent's resurfacing within the 90s Westernized capital revisits conflictual histories told in transition cinema upon a presumably democratized, postmodern Spanish topography.

This contemporary Madrid, attractively "modernized" with sleek university buildings, cosmopolitan professors, and carefree students, harbors a darkness, vestigial traces of blood rivalries. The allusion to the youthful Ana Torrent and her filmic "Ana's" both highlights changes in the new Spain and hints at ghosts still gathered in its landscape—fratricidal destructions, murderous impulses that constitute the "dark legend" (*la leyenda negra*) of the obscurantist Spain of the Inquisition and Lorca's death, a Spain memorialized in the grotesqueries of Goya, Velázquez, Quevedo, Dalí, and Buñuel, among many others.

With the appearance of Bosco as the possible snuff "director," Amenábar problematizes the dialectic of spectatorial distance vs. complicity that he has

The investigator: Angela (Ana Torrent)

articulated through the varying responses of Angela, Chema, Figueroa, and the metro passengers to spectacles of carnage. For Bosco, with his dark, burning eyes, chiseled features, sensuous mouth, and black, curling hair, exemplifies the romantic movie hero, Spanish-style, a masculine ideal for heterosexual female or gay male viewers. His gaze, often filtered through the video camera that he trains on his girlfriend and then on Angela in the "interview," is both repellent and irresistible. Angela is riven by contradictory impulses in which menace becomes indistinguishable from seduction, fear from desire, and ecstasy from abjection.

Angela's extreme psychosexual conflict is put into play in a dream, a nightmarish fantasy sequence framed within meta-cinematic allusions to horror film convention. In the dead of night, a dark figure enters her apartment. A POV from the intruder's perspective (nodding to the use of the predator's perspective as, for instance, in *Friday the Thirteenth*, to enhance the claustrophobic sensation of the hunted victim) shows the terrified Angela watching the bedroom doorknob slowly turn, and the camera cuts to her POV as Bosco appears silhouetted in the doorway. Setting the video camera at eye level, he approaches her bed, whispering with an improbable seductiveness, "I'm going to kill you." The clash between Angela's erotic longing and her fear imbues the scene with an unbearable charge. He pricks her just beneath the jaw with his knife, they kiss passionately, he covers her body with kisses, and then instead of penetrating her phallically, he stabs her. The weapon is blatantly figured as a descendent of a lineage of fetishistic phallus substitutes that figure in horror narratives, from the sharpened wooden stake that impales the vampiric Lucy Westenra, to the knives of Norman Bates, Freddy Krueger, and Jason Voorhees, to the chainsaw of Leatherface and Chop Top. Angela's dying gaze takes in the video camera filming the scene, its red light winking like an evil eye. The *mise-en-abîme* complexity of this death scene, in which the victim becomes the spectator of the most terrible spectacle of all, recalls *Peeping Tom* (1960), whose protagonist literally kills women with the cinematic apparatus by attaching a knife to it and filming them as they watch themselves die.

Georges Bataille's formulation of the nexus between eroticism and extreme experience is illuminating in this context. For Bataille, eroticism is a libidinal force awakened by any radical experience (ritual sacrifice, blood spectacle) that menaces the contours of the integral, cohering, self with a dissolution, a shattering of boundaries between self, other, and universe. The brush with limitlessness that opens toward death both evokes and stands in for the disintegration of self proper to erotic epiphany, tellingly known as "the little death" (*la petite mort*).[4]

However, Amenábar engages with the intersection of violence and eros while also avoiding the misogyny that, Final Girl nothwithstanding, marks many horror films, as well as Bataille's theories and the recent Hollywood-produced, exploitative, meditation manqué about snuff in *8MM* (Joel Shumacher, 1999). Amenábar's probing of the dark recesses of human appetite also involves a complex and ethical exploration of the psychosexual female self in thrall to a love object. That the latter is also a predatory self whose subjugation of its others effects a terrible metamorphosis from living, animate being to inert object, filmic memory of light and shadow, raises disturbing but vital questions about the relation between desire and self-annihilation.

As Angela renews her investigative odyssey with Chema, the web of conspiracy widens. Jorge Castro (Xavier Elorriaga), the professor who takes over the deceased Figueroa's film class, tells the students that Spanish cinema must aspire to Hollywood success by "giving audiences what they want." When Angela, Castro's new advisee, questions ubiquitous media violence and its numbing effect on viewers, Castro insists upon the imperative of a soulless, aesthetically bankrupt industry: audience cravings must drive the market.The force behind a consumerist, sensation-starved, nar-

Caught by the killer (Eduardo Noriega)

cissistic society is bloodlust; where art, ethics, and even morality are sacrificed to cash flow, blood sport will thrive.

Meanwhile, Chema has discovered that Castro himself is implicated in the snuff conspiracy, and frantically calls Angela in the professor's office to warn her. Alas, the professor has already pulled out a video that he'd recorded of Angela discovering Figueroa's body and stealing the tape. Angela manages to flee Castro's office. Back at Chema's apartment, however, she discovers in his closet the same incriminating XT-500 model, and even worse, footage of herself in intimate moments—sleeping and kissing the enlarged, evilly handsome image of Bosco on her home video screen. Hidden lenses are thus ubiquitous: security cameras, video recorders, electronic eyes, instruments that invade private, personal space with a voyeuristic impetus that ultimately kills. Francoist surveillance may be a thing of the past, but an inquisitorial, fratricidal fervor is still fed by this network of spying mechanisms embedded within the very architecture of the new, technologically savvy, consumerist Spain.

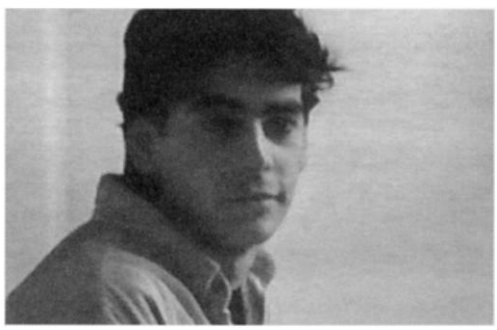
The Final Girl is thus finally on her own, caught in the classic horror dilemma in which all signposts are shrouded in ambiguity. Whom to trust? Will desire lead to death? Her mounting anxiety culminates in the film's climactic scene, in which she attempts to finally penetrate the mystery by visiting Bosco at his chalet just outside Madrid. Once again, this signifier for the affluent *madrileño* family is defamiliarized into a frightening funhouse by a thunderstorm. As the elements assault the landscape, Bosco forces Angela to admit, "Me gustas," or, "You please me, you appeal to me." Splatter film convention has the camera crosscut between a lightning-illuminated image of Chema, whom the camera renders monstrous as a looming, amorphous intruder, breaking into the house and Bosco tenderly lifting Angela's face to his own.

During a subsequent fight in which Bosco brutally beats Chema unconscious, Angela realizes too late that her friend has come to save her. She backs away from the living room into another space that she then understands, also too late and with a nightmarish déjà-vu flash, to be the garage, the primal scene, both banal and terrible, of the snuff film.

Bosco then looms in the doorway. The camera cuts to Angela, tied to a chair, listening in horror to the deadpan confessional in which he informs her of her imminent fate while setting up his video equipment. He will dismember, then re-assemble her with infernal artistry into a new hybrid form.

Bosco is the Spanish for Hieronymus Bosch, the Flemish master of the hellish carnivalesque that disfigures human bodies into unholy travesties of their original shape in the triptych "The Garden of Earthly Delights." This triptych hung in Philip II's castle El Escorial, inspired numerous Spanish artists and monarchs, and remains in the Prado Museum in Madrid today. Bosch's disturbing, surreal representations of human disarticulation, ear drums pierced by giant musical instruments, passion punished by severing and castration, is akin to Bosco's "work." Both evoke a chaotic, obscene, and regressive dissolution of boundaries that, for the psychoanalyst and semiotician Julia Kristeva, characterizes abjection, which "disturbs identity, system, order . . . does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. . . . Abjection is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady, a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles . . . a friend who stabs you."[5]

If, according to psychoanalytic narratives of socialization, language signifies the civilized subject's ability to defer the satisfaction of his desire, to sublimate that desire into symbolic words, art, or artifacts that always stand in for the thing to which they allude, Bosco remains in the pre-socialized sphere of abjection where all impulses are instantaneously fed. His matter-of-fact recitation of the horrors that he will inflict upon Angela will be conflated with their realization in an unholy coupling of word and thing. Bosch's tormented minions are creations, however macabre, that respect the gap between art and life. This contemporary Bosch



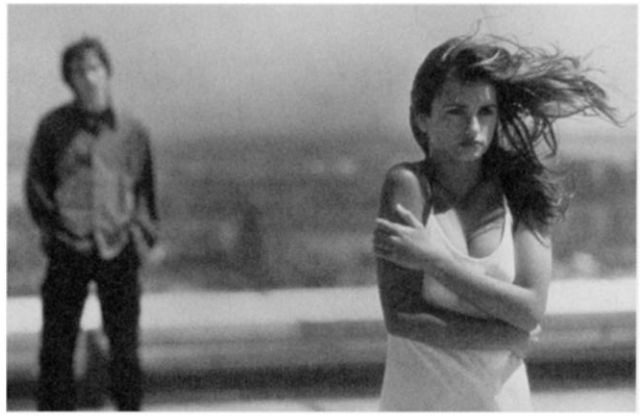
Hunter and hunted . . . and vice versa

actualizes such visions on the living bodies of women through an abjection that subsumes all divisions between the real and the not-real, language and nonsense, inside and outside, the cohering body and its spliced and diced parts and products.

But in Amenábar's redemptive vision, Angela has kept the knife that she carries for protection, thus metaphorically wresting the weapon of patriarchal depredation from its traditional (within horror and noir conventions) phallic keepers. As Bosco prepares to film her, she slices through her bonds, breaks free, attacks him, struggles with him, grabs his gun, and, resisting the (incredibly) still seductive black-leather-clad hand that reaches toward her, shoots him. Reversing her predicament through composure, wits, and tenacity, she has won the battle against Bosco and against herself. The snuff perpetrators (including Castro) are dispatched, transmuted into legitimate (news) footage. Chema recovers to possibly begin a romance with Angela.

Nonetheless, *Tesis* concludes by panning the eager visages of the patients in the hospital where Chema is recuperating. The TV anchor warns that the following images "might be offensive to viewers" (*pueden herir [*wound*] las sensibilidades del espectador*). Voyeuristic frenzy remains within as well as without, and the insatiable desire for media bytes of gore is as lethal to the viewers as to the victims displayed on screen. The obscurantist, fascist Spain excoriated by Buñuel and Saura might be buried under a glittering post-Franco society, but consumerist technologies and economies have awakened new decadent desires as well as summoned back evil energies from the past like so many returns of the repressed.

In his next film, *Abre los ojos* (*Open Your Eyes*, 1997), subtitled and recently released on video through Summit Entertainment, Amenábar continued to develop his darkly oneiric aesthetic toward an exploration of onto-epistemological questions about identity, knowledge, and the significance of the media image within a fin-de-millennium context. Amenábar's success has catapaulted him into the Spanish film scene, along with other young directors such as Alex de la Iglesia, Juanma Bajo Ulloa, Agustín Villaronga, and Imanol Uribe, and he seems poised for international recognition. (There is even word that his next film—*Los otros*, a gothic thriller—will star Nicole Kidman.) The 90s cinema created by these directors is bereft of the political consciousness that characterizes transition cinema, permeated instead with an iconoclastic violence that tackles, for instance, millennial Madrid madness (Iglesia's *Day of the Beast,* 1995), sinister pseudo-science cultists (Villaronga's *The Moon Child*,1989), and shady urban characters living on the edge (Uribe's *Días contados*, 1995). Nonetheless, the uncompromising, razor-edged aesthetic that marks the work of Amenábar and his peers suggests that a dark reservoir of unprocessed recent history remains just beneath the surface of a Westernized, technocratic social-cultural veneer.



Abre los ojos

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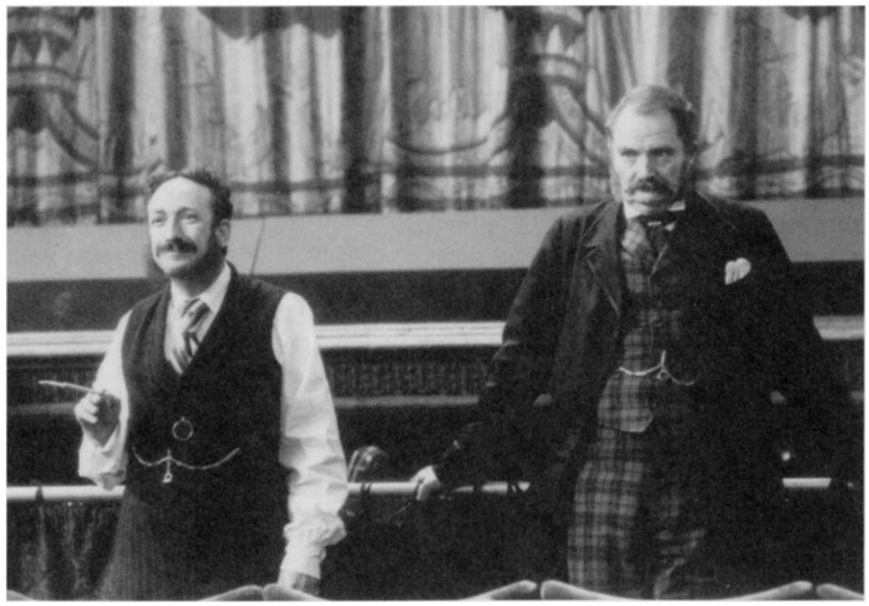
Notes

1. For this idea, see Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the Frenzy of the Visible* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 185–228.
2. Carol Clover, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film," *Fantasy and the Cinema*, ed. Donald Hall (London: British Film Institute, 1989), pp. 91–133.
3. Marsha Kinder, "The Children of Franco in the New Spanish Cinema," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 8, no. 2 (1983): 57–76. Indispensable as well are her essay "The Spanish Oedipal Narrative from Raza to Bilbao," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 13, no. 4 (1991): 67–94, and her book *Blood Cinema: The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993). See as well the illuminating discussion of these issues in Marvin D'Lugo, *The Films of Carlos Saura: The Practice of Seeing* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991).
4. Georges Bataille, *L'Erotisme* (Paris: Minuit, 1957), pp. 17–32.
5. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), pp. 1–31. For Kristeva, the abject signifies a regressive, borderline state prior to language, the civilizing force created by lack and signifying the primordial lost object, the mother's body, and all subsequent absent, desired objects, "the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be" (10).

Topsy-Turvy

Director/writer: Mike Leigh. Producer: Simon Channing-Williams. Cinematographer: Dick Pope. Production designer: Eve Stewart. Editor: Robin Sales. Music: (from Arthur Sullivan) Carl Davis. USA Films.



Allan Corduner (left) and Jim Broadbent as the musical team of Arthur Sullivan and William Gilbert

In making *Topsy-Turvy,* Mike Leigh, a director famous for ignoring the rules of dramatic moviemaking, has made the strange choice of taking those rules upon himself. A Mike Leigh period piece about Gilbert and Sullivan (Sir William and Sir Arthur, respectively, the librettist and composer of the gently satirical and wildly popular late nineteenth-century comic operas) sounds like something out of a Monty Python sketch. What Leigh has come up with is far from laughable—it's one of his best movies—but the Monty Python comparison isn't so far off the mark in terms of his decision to do it in the first place. After the 1999 New York Film Festival screening of *Topsy-Turvy*, Leigh admitted that the improbability, the absurdity, of the idea is at least part of what appealed to him. His "naughty" (Leigh's word) desire to make a movie that apparently goes against the grain of his career seems to have freed him; the movie is unmistakably his own but with a heft, a breadth, and, perhaps because music is at its center, a lyricism that is new and exciting. It's a democratic, big-hearted, open film, but with Leigh's characteristic sharpness and lack of sentimentality.

Topsy-Turvy is the first of the British director's movies to fit comfortably into an established genre. On the surface anyway, it's a part of the well-worn and even old-fashioned tradition of the backstage picture. This is a particularly strange genre for Leigh to take on. His movies are marked by their insistent, stubborn ordinariness, sometimes shading into ugliness. There's never even a suggestion of a Hollywood sheen to his films—the setting is always drab or grim working-class Britain, the characters are, if not unappealing, certainly unexceptional (other than the exceptionally bitter, angry Johnny in *Naked*). And, with regard to plot, Leigh has always rejected the conventions of narrative filmmaking—the story in his movies is always secondary to the characters. All of which makes *Topsy-Turvy* the least likely Mike Leigh project imaginable. The backstage drama would seem to conflict with every one of these tendencies. Even if the movie weren't about two of England's most famous theatrical figures, the fact that it is a period piece erases any sense of ordinariness. And far from attempting to make this vanished world familiar, Leigh emphasizes its strangeness, from our retrospective vantage point (the obsolete, unwieldy phones) as well as from the characters' perspective (the novelty of a pen which houses its own ink). *Topsy-Turvy* is the best kind of period movie: it immerses us in a world which is richly detailed and entirely convincing, but also as alien as that of a science fiction movie.

The characters in a backstage drama are always charismatic and appealing. And the plot is, broadly speaking, almost as fixed as in sports movies, with the successful show in the place of the big game. Leigh doesn't let the genre shackle or limit him, though. If anything, it gives him something to work from, something to apply his approach to, and as a result, from our point of view, the genre acts as a sort of experimental control. Setting *Topsy-Turvy* alongside other backstage dramas allows Leigh's style to stand out in bold relief. The familiar elements make it even more distinctively a Mike Leigh movie because of how he chooses to approach and subvert the genre.

The beauty of the movie is that there's no tension in the confrontation between the genre's conventions

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The Mikado's "Three Little Maids"

and Leigh's approach. He transforms the traditional format by slowing it down, expanding it. Leigh's movies have always worked against the conventions of dramatic filmmaking; he rejects the plot mechanics and the rush toward the conclusion of most movies, and *Topsy-Turvy* is different only in that it contains the conventions it contradicts. But there's nothing jarring about this contradiction. Leigh's not trying to deconstruct or explode the form, to expose the artificiality of the movie's Hollywood forebears, so the conventions and the anti-conventions coexist peacefully and even with a kind of harmony. Leigh simply cleanses the conventions of their artificiality—working within them, he makes them natural, full, convincing.

The first step in this process is to shift the emphasis away from what, according to the tradition of the great-man (or men) movie, should be the film's subject. The only easy way to describe *Topsy-Turvy* is to say that it's a movie about the creation of Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta *The Mikado*. It begins with the duo, having already collaborated on several works, on the verge of ending their professional relationship. The movie shows us their growing estrangement, and then the conception and creation of *The Mikado* from Gilbert's visit to a travelling exhibition on Japanese customs—the inspiration for the show—through the writing, casting, rehearsals, and, finally, the production. But it's misleading to say that *Topsy-Turvy* is a film about Gilbert and Sullivan. They're the most famous and, in some ways, the most charismatic of the movie's characters, and as the creative forces behind the show we see taking shape, they're necessarily at its center. But part of what makes *Topsy-Turvy* such an exhilarating movie is that there's very little distinction between the center and the fringes, between Gilbert and Sullivan and the host of characters—producers, actors, stagehands, and others—surrounding them. Where most movies concentrate on an essential character or story line or concept, with the secondary characters less defined the more tangential they are, *Topsy-Turvy* is written in deep focus. It's not the first movie to pull this off: this is Robert Altman's specialty, and it's been fairly popular lately (*Happiness*, *Boogie Nights*, *Magnolia*, *Cradle Will Rock*, *Black and White*, etc.). But the approach is more striking here because Leigh is dealing with historical characters—and all the audience expectations, conscious and unconscious, that such a choice entails. And it's one thing to expose us to more than the usual number of characters, but Leigh then goes further by declining to introduce them to us. Whole scenes are devoted to characters who seem to be almost totally irrelevant to the story (to what we see as the story) and whose relationships (to Gilbert and Sullivan, to one another) are not at all clear. The movie seems at first sloppy, unfocused, maybe poorly edited. But eventually Leigh's approach comes into focus. What he has put on the screen is a wealth of detail, and it's only when it becomes clear that there is no single subject, that the subject is broad and organic, expanding and shifting to include anything and everything that passes across the screen, that we begin to orient ourselves. Everything eventually falls into place, and the portrait (of a community) turns out to be all the richer and more convincing for having been, at first, apparently so sloppy and chaotic. It's not messy; it's simply full, abundant.

It's partly Leigh's strategy of creating the script in collaboration with his actors, of farming out each character and each scene, that creates *Topsy-Turvy*'s deep, even focus and wealth of detail. Each character, no matter how ostensibly minor, feels vivid enough to be a full-fledged protagonist because each, in a sense, has its own author. Leigh's approach to filmmaking (or, more to the point, to screenwriting) is even more singular than it sounds. Plenty of directors let their actors improvise, and to some improvisation is an integral part of their filmmaking. For Leigh, however, it's not merely a tool for freeing the actors; for him, improvisation doesn't have anything to do with spontaneity, since by the time the cameras are rolling the actors are sticking to the script. His method is a way of freeing the script from the conventions of dramatic writing and of preventing these conventions from overwhelming the characters, from trapping them in an artificial structure. He uses improvisation to write, not to film; to free the characters, not the actors.

As a result, it's not just the number of characters and wealth of detail that take some getting used to—the rhythm of the movie is disorienting at first as well. The movies that *Topsy-Turvy* seems to resemble have a headlong quality to them—they rush us on to the conclusion. But each scene in *Topsy-Turvy* is self-contained; the plot is submerged beneath the events of the moment. It's as if Leigh had frozen each frame of a traditional backstage drama, enlarged it, and made a mini-movie out of each one—each scene has its own stars, its own plot trajectory, its own themes. Each character and each scene has an autonomy that's lacking in most movies, they develop independently from the overall plot, the overriding conception. The movie plays out in two dimensions, so to speak; it moves forward (at its own pace) but also expands outward.

In every backstage drama we watch the rehearsals; we're witness to the behind-the-scenes intrigue; we see, eventually, part of the final performance. But we're rarely allowed to settle in, to appreciate the rehearsal or the intrigue or the performance for its own sake. Watching Gilbert and three of his actors rehearse part of *The Mikado*, we're aware that it's a step in a process and that eventually we'll see their work in its finished form, but we're so engrossed we'd hardly care if the payoff were denied to us. This scene, like almost every other, works on many more levels than we're used to. It's documentarylike in that we can take any number of things away from it. We can choose to observe the creative, theatrical process, with regard to either the writer or the actors; we can watch for insights into the characters, Gilbert or the others; we can appreciate the scene they are practicing and think about how it should be performed; we can simply appreciate the leisurely, open rhythm and shape of the scene. And on some level we appreciate each of these facets.

The same goes for the performances themselves: it's not necessary, plot-wise, to show us the musical numbers in their entirety, but Leigh isn't afraid that engrossing us in a scene from *The Mikado* will distract us from the movie. And this particular risk has a big payoff—it would be a poor movie about an artist if it were unwilling to give us a substantive glimpse of the art. The excerpts we see from the operetta entertain us in their own right, as well as adding to the portrait Leigh is painting—of Gilbert and Sullivan certainly, but also (especially in the beautiful, majestic final shot) of the characters performing the piece.

Leigh's greatest weakness can be his tendency towards caricature, his habit (paradoxical, given his method) of assigning one grotesque trait to his characters. In fairness, his overall strategy is usually to create seemingly one-note, simplistic characters who, over the course of the movie, develop into complicated, multi-layered people. It's an effective approach, but a slightly schematic and, by now, predictable one. The characters in *Topsy-Turvy*, though, become more and more complicated without starting out as caricatures. Leigh reveals their layers with more subtlety and delicacy, and above all more quietly, than in his recent films. The last ten minutes of *Topsy-Turvy* are revelatory. Jim Broadbent's Gilbert and Allan Corduner's Sullivan have been convincing and charismatic from the beginning, but in these last moments, Leigh takes a graceful, utterly unsentimental dip far deeper into their personalities. Having entertained us with their creativity and charisma, he adds a bold, unexpected, clear-eyed final stroke to their portraits, giving us a glimpse of another, less public, more serious side of their personalities, and deepening the movie's attitude towards them. And in a beautiful, immensely moving final gesture, he gives the last moment to a character who has played a relatively small role in the movie thus far, transforming her, in a matter of seconds, into a vivid, fascinating character, and at the same time demonstrating eloquently that, though she has not created the music she is performing, her profound identification with it makes it as much *hers* as it is Gilbert and Sullivan's. *Topsy-Turvy* is a rarity—a movie about artists that is genuinely about art, and the artistic process, rather than merely personality and fame.

Sullivan and Gilbert take a bow with the *Mikado* cast.

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Annual *Film Quarterly* Film Book Survey

PART II

A Distant Technology

Science Fiction Film and the Machine Age

By J. P. Telotte. Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1999. $45.00 cloth; $19.95 paper.

The Machine Age—a period of sweeping technological changes stretching roughly between 1914 and 1939—rocketed the world into the future. Urban landscapes began sprouting setback skyscrapers, cable-spun bridges, and blinking radio towers. At the close of World War I, a new machine aesthetic insinuated itself into this milieu, giving further rise to two ubiquitous modes of transportation—the automobile and the airplane—capable of diminishing great distances with unthrottled velocity. At the heart of this machine aesthetic were the principles of flight and speed—both reflected in the art and design of the era. In 1919, Vladmir Tatlin constructed the model for his proposed Monument to the Third International. An upward explosion of spiraling metal and glass whose colossal size would have dwarfed the Eiffel Tower, Tatlin's Monument was designed to lead the eyes away from this world toward a distant, transcendent world. That same year also saw the opening of the Bauhaus school in Wiemar, which sought to consolidate all the arts under the banner of the International Style and which, by rendering shapes streamlined, hard-edged, and mathematically precise, propelled art toward industrial production. This quarter-century period was capped by two events that counterpoised radically different portraits of the new technological era: the dismemberment of Poland by German and Russian forces, which opened the Second World War; and the 1939 New York World's Fair, which, in addition to heralding the advent of television, showcased an amusing alternative to mechanized warfare in General Motors' Futurama exhibit. By giving visitors the opportunity to time-leap into the "Town of Tomorrow," Futurama crystallized, like a science fiction film might, the quickly diminishing expanse between the "now" and the "not-so-distant future."

As the one machine art to actually fulfill the Bauhausian dream of consolidating the other arts, cinema seemed perfectly poised to engage that "not-so-distant future." And yet, despite the prevalence of pulp publications such as *Amazing Stories* that fostered the public's growing fascination with space exploration and alien cultures and established a solid sci-fi fan-base, only a small number of science fiction films were produced between the two world wars. Because of this, film scholars generally confine their examinations of the genre to either its "golden age"—the era of Hollywood filmmaking spanning the 1950s that witnessed such classics as *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *Forbidden Planet*—or its post-Cold War gravitation toward cyber-rhetoric and "replications" (*The Terminator, Blade Runner*). Whenever the most memorable science fiction films of the Machine Age are mentioned, they are typically couched within discussions of auteurism (*Metropolis*), the avant-garde (*Paris qui dort*), or literary adaptations (*Things to Come*)—artistically contextualized approaches that often fail to disentangle the films' technological implications.

J. P. Telotte's latest book, *A Distant Technology,* attempts to fill this gap in film scholarship, and succeeds with a few notable exceptions. Telotte goes well beyond previous attempts to unlock the cultural conundrums of the Machine Age by focusing on films that, as self-reflexive products of the very technology they record, exude both a sense of wonder and a feeling of uncertainty regarding that technology. This ambivalence stems from a familiar dilemma: Do machines preserve human autonomy by offering ways of circumventing potential disruptions in the social matrix; or do they threaten to isolate people and transform them into insignificant blips on the radar map of a post-human civilization?

Telotte intends to measure the "international circulation of meaning" that took place among "major industrialized countries" during the Machine era. He therefore aims to provide a critical platform from which to survey not only the transactions between spectator and screen but also the thematic convergences and departures expressed in the cross-cultural iconography of Soviet, German, French, American, and British sci-fi films. Though he condenses an enormous chunk of cultural history into succinct mini-depictions of the different sociopolitical landscapes in which Machine Age films emerged, his chosen format proves somewhat schematic; consequently, his central argument, as reiterated in each chapter, occasionally sounds formulaic and repetitive. While his decision to segment the book according to the films' countries of origin is conducive to the examination of discrete national discourses, it tends to occlude any sense of ideological cross-pollination. Moreover, because Telotte frequently relies upon the writings of Jean Baudrillard, Walter Benjamin, Guy Debord, Paul Ricoeur, and Susan Sontag to substantiate his points, his own voice sometimes gets buried beneath a polyphony of loftier voices. In fact, the guiding voice inside this echo chamber of citations belongs to psychologist-philosopher Robert Romanyshyn, whose expression "dream of distance" spurs Telotte's elucidation of the subject.

Thankfully, the book's underlying thesis is fascinating enough to forgive these shortcomings. How, then, do Machine Age science fiction films chronicle the paradoxical attitudes (enchantment and skepticism) that arose during that era and continue to reverberate in the post-contemporary world?

According to Telotte, the science fiction films produced in Wiemar Germany function as emframing machines that, by delivering pictures of a world made seductive in its human vacancy, force spectators to confront their obsoleteness. By looking at this world from so estranged a vantage, and by considering possible means of re-entry, "we might be begin to recognize a deeper sense of order, regularity, and even purpose in our world" (50) and perhaps glimpse a reflection of ourselves in the picture.

Two films in particular, both directed by Fritz Lang, deal with the conflicting desires to escape from and then return to this picture. A filmmaker whose architectural background paved the way for his complex handling of space and distance, Lang transcribes the skyline that he had earlier witnessed from New York's harbor to create a cinematic cityscape of the future, one that spatially delineates the paradoxical attitudes of a nation caught between "the rational and irrational, between the pragmatic and romantic" (52). In *Metropolis,* estrangement is articulated through class stratification, the chasm separating the master of Metropolis, Fredersen, from the workers who populate the catacombs of the city and operate its Central Dynamo. Fredersen, perched above the panorama, monitors the nearly empty city and is completely cut off from its denizens. The workers struggle to get into the picture, their fists raised in an image that recalls the Tower of Babel. When Fredersen's son plumbs the depths of Metropolis, he overrides the distance between leader and worker, eventually uniting them for the betterment of society. Lang's *Die Frau im Mond* similarly engages spectatorial estrangement by devoting much of its screen time to the presentation of technological minutiae: the construction of a rocket, its interior and mechanisms, and the preparation for its launch. Such fetishistic devotion to a spacecraft offering flights away from humanity toward moongold and glory exposes how we can fall "out of the picture" and be obscured by the proliferation and idolatry of technological "things."

Unencumbered by the dark, alienating images of *Metropolis* and *Die Frau im Mond,* the big-budget Hollywood production *Just Imagine* presents both a sprightlier vision of the futuristic city and a less perilous space trip. The New York of 1980 is congested with airplanes; its government is responsible for arranging marriages; its people (whose names have been replaced by random letters and numbers) pop food pills and procure babies through vending machines. However, such dystopian implications are dispelled by frothy musical numbers and vaudevillian booze jokes that fly as fast as the film's space-rocket speeding merrily to Mars. In *Just Imagine,* technology is an attractive amusement that "never really denies individuality and difference; rather, it holds out new possibilities for distinction and success" (120). Although the film is a paean to verticality and upward mobility, offering an enticing combination of gadgetry and Babbitry to audiences in the midst of the Depression, it nevertheless provides a serious critique of the ways technology functions as a continuum between the consumerist culture of America's past and that of its future—a critique that, as Telotte suggests, denies that technological changes "represent *any real change at all*" (121).

Likewise, the British film *Things to Come* "seems torn between future and past, a newly designed world and a lost one, a monumental approach to visual design and a more intimate, human focus" (150). The film is framed by rhyming, yet ironically contrasting images: a miniature toy cannon that, in the England of World War II, connotes the "cultural trivializing of the technological," and the enormous "space gun" towering above Everytown, the Utopia of 2036. This "shift from miniature to monumental" is accompanied by the enthronement of social engineers and an outward celebration of their new, outsized, and thoroughly technologized world. Yet, as Telotte mentions, "[I]n the creation of this new world the human practically vanishes or assumes a small supervisory role as machines set about accomplishing their great task of reconstruction" (156).

Telotte points out that French science fiction films such as René Clair's *Paris qui dort* and Abel Gance's *La Fin du monde* expose the physical and psychological effects distance has on humans through a double articulation of the technological. The remote-control "crazy ray" in Clair's film literally petrifies people; yet the mechanism, as a "new technology that seems to work against the very spirit of the technological, at least against that emphasis on speed, efficiency, and predictability . . . associated with the Machine Age," fails to freeze a small group of Parisians "who were already essentially detached from this world" (77–8). Gance's film charts the public hysteria that arises when a comet

("a distant menace" seen through a telescope) hurtles toward the Earth. What begins as a "retreat from truth" ends with a "rush to religion," a technocratic theology fabricated by scientists who view the "world and its inhabitants from a distant, detached, spectator's position" (95). And yet, like the comet veering at the last moment from its apocalyptic path, even the most detached scientist can be led "back to earth and a human spirit that, in the modern age, seems to have been all but displaced" (95).

Telotte's tour through early Soviet science fiction is the least satisfying chapter. This is to be blamed not on the paucity of films but, rather, on his unconvincing attempt to situate the Russian Revolution itself as the "real" technology undergirding these narrativized "dreams of distance." Equating the Revolution and technology is a provocative maneuver; yet Telotte skimpily and abstractly sketches the effects that the 1917 Bolshevik uprising and Lenin's launch of the New Economic Policy had on the avant-garde and the speculative branch of utopian literature known as *nauchnaia fantastika*—the two artistic arenas most penetrated by technological inroads. Sustaining such an analogy or "fit" (the difficulty of which Telotte readily admits) would require a greater elaboration of the Revolution's blending of science and socialism. (By comparison, the "New York World's Fair as science fiction" analogy Telotte scrupulously constructs in the penultimate chapter of the book is much easier to swallow.)

His analysis of the Yakov Protazanov-directed *Aelita* is, however, particularly keen and, trailing the publication of Ian Christie's article "Down to Earth: *Aelita* Relocated," sheds light on a critically maligned, propagandistic oddity. Based on a bestseller by engineer-turned-novelist Alexei Tolstoi and geared to advocate anti-capitalist ideals, the film departs from its source material to suggest both the danger *and* the seduction technological knowledge holds for its working-class audience. In the novel, the knowledge gained on Mars helps to alleviate the economic problems plaguing Russia. The film, however, culminates with an even more ideologically "correct" sentiment, one that underscores the hazards in detaching oneself from the Revolution: Los, the protagonist, wakes to find that his trip to Mars was nothing more than a daydream, a withdrawal from his duties back home. As Telotte observes, *Aelita*'s conclusion foregrounds the ways an individual can be seduced and subsequently snared by, among other things, American consumerism, as represented by the technological supremacy of Mars and the red planet's firebrand queen, whose scheming rallies her rebel-workers in a coup d'état.

The sporadic frustrations of this book do not detract from its usefulness. Readers hoping to encounter cinematic curios—those neglected treasures that dwell well outside the canon—will not be disappointed. One of the pleasures of reading *A Distant Technology* is sharing the insights of a person who looks soberly at films that provoke little more than chuckles from the ranks of a stuffy and calcified academia. Telotte understands that such films and serials as *The Tunnel, F.P. 1 antwortet nicht, The Invisible Ray, Flash Gordon,* and *The Phantom Empire* not only offer an immediate sense of the shaping of the modern but also anticipate the postmodern. By that alone he enriches the study of science fiction and suggests a wider scope for subsequent explorations of the genre.

David Scott Diffrient is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Film and Television at U.C.L.A.

Entertaining the Third Reich

Illusions of Wholeness in Nazi Cinema

By Linda Schulte-Sasse. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996. $54.95 cloth; $18.95 paper.

When confronted with that historical body of feature films produced during the Third Reich under the supervision of propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, it is tempting to dismiss them as simplistic documents of ideological manipulation, condemned both on account of their former hate-mongering function and for their blending of kitsch and blatantly inaccurate, indeed confabulatory historical citations in the service of fascist political discourse. With the tools of temporal hindsight, the majority of today's scholarly viewers are inclined to regard these films from a perspective that is emotionally distanced and politically neutral, but easily susceptible to deteriorating into a posture of both moral and aesthetic superiority. Such a stance seems untenable in this era of discourse analysis, accompanied as it is by a recognition of the heterogeneity inherent both to textual documents and to the eras in which they are produced. In her study of Nazi cinema, Linda Schulte-Sasse refers to this overall malleability of text and discourse as "the infinite corruptibility of narrative formations, whose structures can be filled with whatever content serves a given purpose" (2). What has been overlooked in the standard scholarly tomes on cinema of the Nazi era is, she argues, the fundamental reality that these films were not "merely" political instruments but that they were also intended to entertain their targeted viewership. They thus exhibit many of the textual mechanisms of identification and of triggering the circuitries of desire characteristic of both earlier Ufa productions and of Hollywood classics. One of the underlying problematics accompanying such a revision of earlier scholarly approaches to Nazi cinema is that of somehow still upholding the distinction between propaganda and entertainment, and perhaps more urgently, dealing with propaganda that is, in fact, engaging entertainment. For propaganda can be at its most effective precisely when it appears completely normal, when we begin to suspend judgement and become caught up in narrative pleasure and identification with various, even conflicting film characters and their attendent political valencies. Schulte-Sasse's approach of "fighting movies with movies," as she phrases it, takes into consideration the oft-overlooked "normalcy" built into so many of these film texts which renders them riddled with the ideological ruptures and internal contradictions endemic to narrative form generally.

The blurring of boundaries which this methodological approach implies furthermore results in a categorical re-

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assessment of Nazi films as traversing traditional distinctions between "high" and "low" art. On the one hand, these films drew thematically upon the legacy of certain prominent German writers, artists, and rulers to authenticate and lend legitimacy to particular political discourses and to afford possibilities for symbolic identification. Traditionally, the Enlightenment project espoused by Goethe, Schiller, and Lessing (the usual suspects!) has been associated with humanity, tolerance, and rationalism, a shift from centralized power to a more democratic distribution of political power, and what in Foucaultian terms can be described as a shift from externalized to internalized discipline. National Socialism, on the other hand, maintained an explicitly antimodernist agenda, wherein power was to be centralized in a single individual organically destined to unite a social body feudally structured to include "natural" caste differences. Schulte-Sasse points out that many theorists of fascism, Georg Lukács, for example, employ linear reasoning to explain how the "good" intentions of the Enlightenment went "bad," leading to the catastrophic ramifications of the Third Reich. She counters, as have others, that eighteenth-century aesthetics already contained an anti-rationalist kernel from which Nazism cultivated its authoritarian platform. In particular, the genre of the eighteenth-century bourgeois tragedy, one of film melodrama's early precursors, was reinvoked and invested with a politicized message easily consumed by viewers familiar with its form and deriving pleasure from the illusion of wholeness which its family-based narrative proffered.

Entertaining the Third Reich is divided into three sections. Part I analyzes the dialectic inhering in the rhetorical category of "the Jew," as well as the two bodies (social and biological) of the King, using *Jew Süss, Fridericus, The Great King,* and *The Old and the Young King*. Part II discusses the legacy of so-called "genius" films, which anachronistically reappropriated the biographies of various prominent historical figures to make a point about manifest leadership, using *Friedrich Schiller—Triumph of a Genius, Komödianten,* and *Friedemann Bach*. Part III moves out of the eighteenth-century narrative to discuss the coextension of money and foreignness in *Robert and Bertram, Gold, Hitler Youth Quex, Hans Westmar, S.A. Man Brand, For Human Rights,* and *Pour le mérite*. To explore Nazism's fascination with machines as the ideal embodiment of the armoured social body harnessed in the service of productivity, the author discusses the films *The Ruler, Diesel, Request Concert,* and *The Great Love*. Schulte-Sasse's formidable whirlwind of film plots, close readings, and theoretical exegeses concludes with a few thoughts on that most fantastical and perplexing product of Nazi cinema, produced to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Ufa film company: von Baky's *Münchhausen*. The author reads a number of sequences against the grain to demonstrate how the film arguably also includes a critique of Nazi's ideology of wholeness, as metaphorized in the repeated imagery of decapitation, of bodies that lose their heads, first playfully and then with increasing violence.

The primary theoretical reference points for Schulte-Sasse's study are mapped along the works of Slovenian theorist Slavoj Žižek (himself steeped in Lacanian psychoanalysis), Klaus Theweleit's by now classic study of fascist iconography in print media, and Jürgen Link's work on collective symbolism and on historical connections between modern popular cultural texts and "high" literary genres of the eighteenth century. Žižek appears to have informed Schulte-Sasse's approach most consistently, particularly with regard to his theory of politics as constituted in terms of social fantasies. Within this schema, society as a unified body is an abstraction, a delusion upheld by means of fantasies perpetuated in a number of media forms, including the cinema. Fantasy, Žižek has further maintained, is necessary as a means to conceal the fact that desire is essentially unfulfillable, at best giving way to new desire. It provides a narrative framework channelling chaotic feelings in a way that does not actually fufill desires so much as enable them to come into existence in a coherent form. Žižek offers a particularly useful lens for reading Nazi cinema, because National Socialism pursued with a most particular vehemence its utopian vision of a unified social body striving toward an organic and racially "pure" corporatist ideal. Schulte-Sasse posits Nazi film as maintaining a dialectical relationship between the fantasy of the Jew and that of the Leader or of a Leader-People bond. Within this dialectic, the Jew becomes a phantasmatic category, that material entity hindering the yearning for social perfection, and herein providing an alibi for the as-yet-unrealized status of the vision while also holding forth the possibility of its immanent fruition.

Schulte-Sasse warns against the tendency to create out of that discursive category, "Nazism," a homogenous "Other" against which we can situate our own untroubled (i.e., liberal) identities, and points to how scholarly narrativization of Nazism can serves as a facile means of containing its disturbing elements. At the same time, it is also true that the author's own readings occasionally lean towards formulaic interpretations—perhaps an unavoidable pitfall, given the highly codified apparatus of psychoanalysis, where interpretation can easily become a matter of plugging in such categories as "the Subject," "specular object," "the gaze," "desire," "Thing," etc., along the asymptotes of the filmic narrative, in order to map out a narrative logic that complies with Žižekian notions of social fantasy. For that matter, Žižekian theory itself invites such proclivities, given the striking gift this congenial theorist possesses for rendering lucid and seemingly self-evident the most convoluted of Lacan's seminars and therein offering rather convincing "illusions of wholeness" (to which this reviewer acknowledges having readily succumbed in her own research pursuits). What rescues Schulte-Sasse's readings from the pitfall of shrink-wrapped paradigms packaged for easy consumption is not only her own vigilant self-reflexivity, but also the reality that the Nazi films in question are themselves hopelessly riddled with ideological inconsistences, short-circuits in the trajectories of desire, and bald poetic, nay political, license deployed in the manipulation of historical chronologies. Many of the films, as the author points out, thus remain peculiarly vulnerable to oppositional reading, defying precisely the unilateral semantics alleged to characterise the propaganda genre.

It also bears mentioning that Schulte-Sasse possesses an uncommonly engaging writing style, one in which she does not attempt to dismiss or conceal the manner in which her own analyses and conclusions have evolved in the course of her research and the compilation of this manuscript. Her acknowledgement of the centrality of process, both that of assessing her own aesthetic responses to films as well as that of mapping out a viable theoretical excursus, contributes in a significant way to the interventionary merits of this book. In effect, the author restores a necessary "subjective factor," one which concedes the way in which this spurious film genre can move its viewing subject while also self-reflexively employing this emotional engagement as a critical tool with which to cull further insights—insights elaborated with wit, irony, even playfulness. The no-nonsense quality of her writing clearly reflects years of experience teaching inquisitive undergraduates who won't stand for theoretical bulldozing or casual name-dropping. The end product possesses a seldom-attainable admixture of both significant scholarly merit and broad student accessibilty.

Angelica Fenner received her doctorate in German from the University of Minnesota/Minneapolis and is a lecturer in the Department of Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature.

John Woo

The Films

By Kenneth E. Hall. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co, 1999. $45.00.

Firmly situated within the Hollywood system as long as his films make money, John Woo can now see his current status as action film director assured. But the label is both limited and inaccurate. Ken Hall's work is the first book-length study on the director based upon detailed research as well as personal interviews with Woo himself, business partner Terence Chang, and actors Chow Yun-fat, Danny Lee, Lance Henriksen, Arnold Vosloo, Kasi Lemmons, and Chuck Pfarrer, as well as phone and fax interviews with others such as Joan Allen, Willie Carpenter, Philip Kwok, Christian Slater, and John Travolta. The amount of time and effort Hall devoted to discovering important factual information is laudable.

However, the limited number of pages (247) given to this study contrasts unfavorably with the more generous allowance given to studies by authors such as Edmund G. Bansak and Garry Yoggy. Apparently, the economics of contemporary publishing are largely to blame for only a brief treatment of certain pre-1986 Woo films such as *The Young Dragons* (1973), *Last Hurrah for Chivalry* (1978), and *Plain Jane to the Rescue* (1982). But despite the need for a detailed interrogation of other key early works such as the director's Cantonese opera production *Princess Chang Ping* (1976) and his Ricky Hui comedies such as *Money Crazy* (1977) and *From Riches to Rags* (1979), Hall has provided a promising stimulus for future studies in this area.

Well versed in Western and Chinese literary and cinematic traditions, Hall opens his study with a consideration of Woo's relationship to this diverse field. The director's world view not only encompasses classic Chinese works such as *The Water Margin* and *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms,* as well as Japanese *bushido* concepts, but also cinematic traditions appearing in the works of Martin Scorsese, Samuel Fuller, Francis Coppola, Chang Cheh, Stanley Kubrick, Alfred Hitchcock, Akira Kurosawa, Masaki Kobayashi, Sergio Leone, Sam Peckinpah, Don Siegel, Robert Aldrich, and Jean-Pierre Melville. Although Woo often acknowledges the influence of other directors on his work, his usage never approaches the derivative methodology of lesser talents within the Hollywood system. As Hall comments, "Woo's quotation of directors and films is relatively limited or at most not particularly conscious. Instead, he may parallel the work of a director or actor, or he may independently achieve a result that *looks* like another director's work. This fact explains why Woo is not like some of his imitators, or why he is not like directors who self-consciously quote others' work: this is what saves him, too, from being campy" (33). For example, although Woo cites a scene from *The Shining* in *The Killer,* he reworks it in a creatively transformative manner to provide different meanings. Woo uses the blood reference from *The Shining* to visualize Jenny's "subjective perception and memory of her blinding" (118) in a different dimensional perspective from that of Kubrick. Also, Woo has cited Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* "as a model for developing and sustaining suspense while not losing narrative and visual fluidity" (51), an influence which appeared in *Face/Off's* opening carousel sequence—derived from a screenplay written before Woo's involvement in the project but one he developed during the course of filming.

Hall definitively challenges many critical and popular misconceptions concerning Woo's work as well as misappropriations by lesser talents. Woo is not a slavish parodist. "Those who perceive such a man as a parodist (in the usual sense) are feeding his films with their own prejudices. Probably they see the Tarantino in Woo instead of what they *should* see, the vestiges of Woo in Tarantino. Woo is not Tarantino; he does not appropriate only to parody" (117). Instead, the director creatively explores and develops Eastern and Western traditions he is familiar with. Hall's second chapter deals with these features, while his third correctly takes issue with those who see Woo exclusively as an action director. Rather, Hall elaborates Woo's use of spatial and temporal perception as well as his stylistic use of "alternately tracking shots, rack focus, triangular set-ups and violation of continuity" used in an intelligently "conscious and aware manner" (71). Hall also supplies some revealing information, such as noting the centrality of Jean-Pierre Melville's *Le Cercle rouge* (as well as *Le Samourai*) to *The Killer* as well as tracing its debt to a little-known, but influential, 1964 Toei production, *Narazumono* (starring Takakura Ken and Testuro Tanba). Woo also acknowledges Michael Mann's *Manhunter* as another film inspiring *The Killer.*

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Tony Williams teaches in the English Department at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

Landscapes of Loss

The National Past in Postwar French Cinema

By Naomi Greene. Princeton University Press, 1999. $60.00 cloth; $19.95 paper.

Landscapes of Loss is an enigmatic title for this keen book, whose more direct subtitle reads: *The National Past in Postwar French Cinema.* I have been awaiting its appearance since I first agreed to read the manuscript for Princeton University Press. How could I not, given its titular relation to my own Princeton book, *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film.* Greene went much further than did I in historicizing an emotion, "loss," which, being a universal, strictly speaking should not have a history at all. But it is the French who have pioneered writing histories of universals (most famously, Philip Aries' *Western Attitudes Toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present*), and Greene follows their lead. French culture since World War II and particularly since the 1960s, she asserts, has exhibited in its cinema a passion for the past that requires explanation. As one part of her introduction notes, the French have always been interested in their national past, though mainly in a celebratory mode, in the spectacles of the 20s and in the literary adaptations that come out every year. Ginette Vincendeau would argue that even the 1930s could be called a cinema of nostalgia, as countless standard films look back to the *belle époque* for their material and their style. But Greene wants to identify a deeper form of memory film, one in which the past is cinematographically excavated and exposed so as to resituate the troubled present. This is a modernist project, perhaps coming to an end with the postmodern "Cinéma du Look."

Greene's task would have been simpler had she inflated her third chapter to the size of the entire book, for there she selects a group of films that return to France's most troubling moment, the Occupation. Instead she pulls back and softens focus so as to address a larger range of French historical films. In chapter 5 she groups films dealing with the decline and fall of colonialism in Algeria and Indochina, whereas chapters 2 and 4 are devoted to Alain Resnais and Bertrand Tavernier, important auteurs well known for their historical films. A concluding chapter attempts to establish the historical mimicry of the recent Cinéma du Look, arguing that this turning back from history to the history of cinema leads to a dead end.

Concern with the past can be intangible; Greene claims to parse her large but not systematically chosen corpus into sections on a "shifting arc," but she also speaks of dividing them into "strands and levels." Problems attend each of these metaphors. Taking the historical impulse of French cinema as a synchronic block, she wants her chapters to sample different levels within it, but she does not provide a rationale for her choices (how many levels there might be and why these are the best to investigate), nor give a structural description of the block before slicing. On the other hand, by treating the historical impulse in its diachronic dimension, as a "shifting arc," her chapters provide a generally chronological survey of this national cinema from the 50s to our own day by concentrating on one of its most telling themes, national history. This I find the more suitable apology for her effort. And the results stand up well when measured against overviews of recent French cinema in English which struggle to make sense of the more than 5,000 films produced in France since May 1968 alone. Greene restricts herself to a single "strand," observing it weave its way through changes in French political and cultural life. She occasionally looks at other strands, such as literary production, but for the most part she sticks close to cinema on the one hand and to historiography on the other, both related to changes in attitude felt in the eras of de Gaulle, Giscard, Mitterand, and beyond.

In fact, Greene spends scant effort establishing her method or the assumptions it entails. One can hardly blame her for avoiding the always unpleasant and nitpicking arguments over inclusions and exclusions. She prefers instead to get to the thick historiographic atmosphere which French films have exhaled since the New Wave. Some may object that her choices favor accessible titles (on Bravo or on cassette) and seldom venture beyond known filmmakers. But in a book that does not pretend to be comprehensive and whose 200 pages stick doggedly to her announced topic, she has a right to discuss whatever films strike her as rich and pertinent. Moreover, she does in fact bring forward certain

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lesser-known directors (René Allio, Jacques Audiard). I question only the daring final chapter, since the premises of what is meant by "the past" shift radically from historical moment (or period) to historical style. I question if viewers see *Delicatessen* as a film about the Popular Front cinematic tradition in the way that viewers certainly watch *Lacombe Lucien* as a film about French collaboration during the Occupation. Perhaps Greene has accomplished just what she wants in concluding in a manner that elicits exactly such a response. For this disjunction puts both the past and the cinema under a dramatic kick-light that is potentially clarifying. In her rather apocalyptic finale Greene suggests that her topic, historicality in cinema, may have come to an end in today's films that mimic the look of older films and renounce a serious commitment to probing social history.

This seems an odd conclusion for a book whose excellent introduction establishes beyond question the persistence of reflection on the past, and particularly in the French context. Greene calls on a phalanx of French intellectuals who have made history the center of cultural understanding over the past 30 years: Pierre Nora, Jacques Le Goff, Henry Rousso, Michel Foucault, François Dosse, Michel Winock, Jean-Claude Schmitt, Raoul Girardet. The taste she provides of their electrifying arguments may be enough to send American readers to the rich works of historiography they have each produced (although you'll need to work through the endnotes since Princeton failed us here in not insisting on a bibliography, which should have been simple to construct). Allowing these intellectuals to cover ground for her, the introduction evokes her subject in a way that is both swift and detailed. It serves as a fluid tour through a suite of related subjects, concatenating a theory of memory, annales historiography (*longue durée, mentalités*), the Vichy syndrome, French identity and distinctiveness, the end of socialist aspirations, the anxieties of the 1990s in Europe (postcolonialism, European unity, ethnic diversity, anti-Americanism), the distinctiveness of French cinema, the shift to images-based history, and more. Greene evokes this complex ambience sensibly and with ease, readying us for the analyses to follow.

The body of the book then proceeds to alternate chapters on her two selected auteurs with those on films set during the Occupation and the final years of colonialism. Greene could say of this organization (although she doesn't) that chapters 3 and 5 provide a horizontal scansion of the landscape of loss, since they treat a series of quite different filmmakers concerned to evoke an historical moment that haunts the culture, and that the auteur studies, on the other hand, permit her to probe an historical sensibility in depth as it moves from past moment to past moment (Resnais touching on Hiroshima, the Holocaust, Algeria, and the 1930s, while Tavernier has dipped back to WWI, even to the late medieval period, while also treating the Algerian war).

Alain Resnais stands as an incontestable launching pad for a book with this title, and Greene's remarks on his films are so concentrated as to be at times as mesmerizing as the films themselves. Indeed, Resnais's achievement in generating a cinema of loss after the Holocaust (pace Deleuze) may be so great as to dwarf the importance of the filmmakers that Greene turns to next. For she concludes her discussion of Resnais with *Stavisky* and *Providence* (1974 and 1977) as if they engendered the *mode retro* of the 70s and 80s. I wonder what her views might be on the whimsical *On connait le chanson*? Has Resnais succumbed to the bankruptcy of history she finds endemic to the current era?

In her crucial third chapter Greene might claim to follow the precedent of Henry Rousso's influential *Vichy Syndrome*. His psychoanalytic thesis suggests that a society goes through a series of phases in coming to terms with a national trauma such as that of the years of Occupation. One of Rousso's most important phases was reached in 1970, triggered by Marcel Ophuls' *Le Chagrin et la pitié*. In the following decade a good many French films delved into the Occupation period, which had been effectively off-limits until then. Rousso assiduously refrains from judging responses to the past as correct, inappropriate, or immoral, although he does show that certain attitudes "work through" trauma, while others merely cycle into unproductive repetitions. Greene is more likely to judge some directors clear-headed (Ophuls), others soft and obfuscating (Truffaut). Still, she tries to adopt Rousso's guise of anthropologist, describing stages through which France has moved on a timetable to psychic recovery. Greene does not take a census of these films; and even if she had, they could hardly constitute a groundswell of interest, given that they never represent more than seven percent of national output, and altogether make up closer to three percent during this period. Instead, she takes an especially close look at five films of the 70s and 80s, all by well-known auteurs: *Le Chagrin et la pitié,* Malle's *Lacombe Lucien* and *Au revoir, les enfants,* Truffaut's *Le dernier métro,* and Chabrol's *Histoire des femmes*. The chapter is satisfying because Greene carefully raises enduring issues (concerning women, Jews, institutions) and shows how their treatment varies with changing public perceptions brought on by trials, by newly unearthed archival material, and by the inevitable arrival of a new generation of French people who know the period only through representation. A number of recent films, some not easy to see, are referenced in the important final section of this chapter.

Since Resnais's *Stavisky* came out the same year as Tavernier's first feature, *L'horloger de Saint-Paul,* Greene forces a comparison between the two men, the former cerebral and haunted, the latter somber. Though well written, these chapters take the shape of rather standard auteur studies, deflecting attention from the book's focus, though not from its topic. Greene seems anxious to treat as many films by these prolific directors as she can, and one senses, particularly with Tavernier, her desire to place each film in an overall directorial profile. She seems anxious to establish the importance of a quite popular director who is often dismissed by intellectuals. In the tradition of auteurist writing, she paints pictures of her directors that don't allow history to alter very much an "essential" vision of history. Something gets sets aside in such a game: the particular style of each film. Reading Greene, you hardly sense the vast stylistic difference of the interview film *La Guerre sans nom* and the spectacle *Que*

la fête commence. She may mention the form of each film, but the form does not particularly affect her reading of the historiography at work. The same may be said for Resnais. Should not the fact that *L'année dernière à Marienbad* contains fewer than 200 shots while *Muriel* has over 1200 affect these texts in their very effort at representing the past? Like most auteur analyses, Greene's best insights develop similarities, not differences, among films. For example, the soundtracks of this last pair of films both fill up on occasion with whispers, the repressed past seeping through the speakers in the theater. This is a fine observation, one that treats a specifically cinematic representation of loss.

But the largest danger with auteur studies is their temptation to overinflate their subjects. Greene accords to Tavernier's career an arc similar to that of Jean Renoir's incomparable suite of films in the 1930s. Both men, she feels, reflect in their films the swiftly changing political attitudes of their respective moments. To make this point, Greene has to bend dates (implying that the Popular Front optimism of *La Marseillaise* precedes the more sober *La grande illusion*). She has also to adopt, at least for the Tavernier chapter, a belief that aesthetic production is linked in nearly mechanical fashion to political history. Despite her efforts, in my view Tavernier, unlike Resnais and certainly unlike Renoir, does not support the weight of history she puts upon him. He may be an occasion for Greene to discuss the representation of various periods in French history (the Regency, the Commune, the Great War, etc.), but he cannot be said to have achieved anything like the populist historiographic cinema of Renoir.

The book gets back on track with the discussion of the films on Indochina and Algeria. While few would take *Le Crabe-Tambour* and *Outremer* as top-level films, Greene uses them brilliantly to expose conflicted attitudes toward the past. Equally important, she provides in this chapter an extensive airing of Pierre Nora's theses about the loss of memory in our era of history. Nora then leads Greene into her final chapter (on the Cinéma du Look) where she exposes the loss in recent French cinema not just of memory but of anything except a "hollow history" imitating or playing with past styles of representation. Many critics have disparaged the pretensions of Jean-Jacques Beneix, Luc Besson, and even Leos Carax by comparing them to the New Wave directors whom they in fact invoke themselves. Greene's focus on history makes this claim stick, for she adeptly demonstrates the difference between a search for authenticity through citation in the early Godard and Truffaut and the imitation of such a search in *Diva* or *Subway*.

Throughout Greene is more apt to cite other scholars, always pertinent and brilliant ones, than to initiate her own arguments. At the end Greene leans heavily on Fredric Jameson's elaborate reading of *Diva*. Jameson's very large perspective concerning globalism, capitalism, and the fate of history seems to give her the terms with which to bring her book to its pessimistic conclusion. Her epilogue raises paramount issues about national identity and its loss in today's French cinema, despite governmental efforts to shore up this cultural legacy and rallying point. The emigration of French filmmakers to Hollywood, the immigration of diverse peoples into the French nation, the ossifying of its culture in a cult of museums, and the dual pressures of Americanization and Europeanization have evaporated the natural rapport French cinema once enjoyed with its culture. French cinema has become a "theme park," she writes.

I am not certain that this 200-page survey of the French cinematic landscape leads inevitably to the loss of memory and of genuine history evident in the empty nostalgia of the Cinéma du Look or in the quaintly reassuring Euro-Disney. Under the spell of the millennium, Greene seems to succumb to sentiments that her entire book ultimately fights, for *Landscapes of Loss* will help insure the presence of a certain cinema even if the past it deals with is fading out. Like *Hiroshima, mon amour,* the deep discussion of which keys her undertaking, Greene recognizes the inevitable and routine historical process by which trauma is forgotten. Resnais named this "the horror of oblivion." His film resists this horror; so too does Naomi Greene's careful and dignified book.

Dudley Andrew teaches in the Film Studies Department at Yale University.

Orson Welles, Shakespeare, and Popular Culture

By Michael Anderegg. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999. $42.50 cloth; $16.50 paper.

According to Orson Welles, his interviews were often unreliably transcribed, especially in *Cahiers du cinéma,* but there is every reason to believe in the accuracy, sincerity, and significance of what was recorded as his uncharacteristically straightforward response to a *Cahiers* interviewer's leading question, "Wouldn't you say that the greatest influence discernible in your work was Shakespeare?" "Yes," Welles said simply, "without any doubt." Even a superficial acquaintance with Welles reveals that throughout his life he manifested what in an early essay "On Staging Shakespeare and Shakespeare's Stage" he described as "that zealous and jealous love which most intelligent people, once exposed to him, must inevitably feel for Shakespeare." *Everybody's Shakespeare*—the title of the volumes of selected plays introduced by this essay—is, without contradiction, simultaneously his Shakespeare as well, and Welles's experiences, accomplishments, and ambitions from the beginning (including early childhood readings of and roles in various plays, and a haunting deathbed recital of lines from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by his mother) to the end (he was working on a film of *King Lear* when he died) repeatedly and inextricably link his name with Shakespeare's.

To some, this may sound like old news on the Rialto. There have been many fine critical studies (by James Naremore, Jack Jorgens, Richard France, Anthony Davies, and Lorne Buchman, to name only a few) of Welles's theatrical productions of Shakespeare, especially his so-called "voodoo" *Macbeth* and anti-fascist *Julius Caesar,* and his films of

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Macbeth, Othello, and *Chimes at Midnight,* so much so that Michael Anderegg begins *Orson Welles, Shakespeare, and Popular Culture* with a more than rhetorical query as to whether we really need another book on Welles to go over that ground again. His answer is characteristically—and unnecessarily—humble: perhaps a short book, he says (ix). A reviewer can be somewhat bolder than an author in such matters: Yes, in thunder, we definitely need Anderegg's book, which goes far beyond even as it relies on recent critical studies and biographies of Welles, especially Simon Callow's first volume of a projected two, which is finely attuned to all aspects of Welles's theatricality and theatrical experience, and the long chapter on Welles in Michael Denning's *The Cultural Front,* which places his work of the 1930s and early 1940s in a far-ranging progressive cultural and political context.

Anderegg's compact but masterful study has an extensive horizontal axis, as he surveys many details of Welles's literal involvement with Shakespeare's works, but also an even more deeply impressive vertical axis: the heart of the book is Anderegg's reconceptualization and expansion of the Shakespearean dimension of Welles that goes a great deal beyond mere "textuality," grounding it in the cultural and even political history of Shakespeare in America and persuasively demonstrating that this Shakespearean dimension is central in all of Welles's roles as a theatrical and cinematic director, actor, entrepreneur, public figure, and educational and political activist. For Welles, Shakespeare embodies the fulfillment of almost utopian personal and sociopolitical desires: he is a figure of tremendous stature, power, and popularity, a colossus straddling the worlds of critical and commercial success. To a modern artist he offers authority, cultural validation, and the possibility of a large audience without requiring subservience or undue compromise. Shakespeare combines individual imagination and artistic independence with tradition and social responsibility. Perhaps most important, as Anderegg emphasizes, he has the unique capacity to entertain, educate, transport, and ultimately unify disparate audiences, both high and low.

With all this in mind, we are in a better position to understand more fully Welles's statement in *Filming Othello* that Shakespeare is "very possibly our greatest man": far from being an enervating emblem of the "anxiety of influence" or a property held only by the privileged, he is—or at least can be—a model of and vehicle for individual and cultural analysis, integrity, achievement, and renovation, a vital natural resource integral to any comprehensive New Deal. "Playing" Shakespeare, in all the manifold meanings of that suggestive phrase, is thus a remarkably apt way of describing Welles's lifelong project, and lies beneath not only his productions of Shakespeare's texts but also such otherwise apparently fractured phenomena as his self-mocking but self-assertive radio and television appearances with Rudy Vallee and Lucille Ball, his often hyperstylized persona (whether selling Paul Masson wine, bandying with Merv Griffin, or galvanizing and recentering films that he appears in only briefly), and his strenuous efforts to make the word "democratic" truly describe American culture and society of

the twentieth century. All these are Shakespeare-inflected, a phrase that hardly does justice to the complex dramas embedded therein that Anderegg skillfully calls our attention to. Some of these moments are ironic, poignant, even a bit disturbing, as when Welles is called upon to recite some lines from *Romeo and Juliet* as well as levitate Lucy, or use his Shakespearean voice as a pitchman: Anderegg does not shy away from the fact that much of Welles's work "could not help but be tinged with his Shakespearean identity, if only for purposes of comic deflation" (11). Welles played along with this deflation, early as well as late in his career, sometimes willingly, other times reluctantly, but the resources of Shakespeare were far more than a joke to him: they could be mobilized for remarkable effects, as in, to take an example not discussed by Anderegg, the first of his radio broadcasts for Isaac Woodard, Jr., a black serviceman returning from the war and blinded by a brutal white police chief. This, as much as *The War of the Worlds,* deserves to be known as the quintessential Welles radio show and as one of his most compelling Shakespearean performances. Even without a single line from the play, it is an updated *King Lear,* with Welles intoning mightily, threatening vengeance, predicting doom, but ultimately calling for justice and healing based on compassion, humility, and forgiveness.

Anderegg traces three intersecting levels of drama throughout his book. He spends the least amount of time on the literal drama of Shakespeare's plays, although scattered throughout are fine comments on how Welles embodied key Shakespearean plots, themes, and characters in his radio, film, and television work. The second might be called the personal drama of Welles, as he struggled to find his way as an artist, shape his career, and utilize his multiple talents (especially his voice and charismatic presence), and Anderegg nicely shows—particularly in his concluding and perhaps most groundbreaking chapter, "Welles as Performer"—how all the stops along the way were Shakespearean in one form or another. The third level, in many respects the most important and the backdrop for the others, might be called the drama of twentieth-century America, in which Welles becomes a focal point to explore the decline of a culture and society that once at least envisioned holding high and low (class and brow) together, and in which the prospect of playing a scene from Shakespeare in a backwoods settlement or saloon (as envisioned in *Huck Finn* and John Ford's *My Darling Clementine,* as Anderegg recalls) might be humorous but was not ridiculous.

The drama of high and low, to adapt a phrase from Lawrence Levine's study, "The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America," is always on Anderegg's mind as he examines Welles's role in American culture, particularly how he attempted to serve and occasionally reshape the needs and desires of that culture, and also how he suffered under and tried to respond creatively to that culture's pressures, restraints, and shaping forces. At some points in his career, Welles was relatively free to, in the words of one of his stage directions, "Raise Hell with Everything," and his theatrical productions of *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar* turned Shakespeare into front-page, popular, and critically acclaimed events. And he was not averse to catching as well as making a wave: Anderegg unearths and quotes from a publicity memo stating that "Welles believes in cashing in on the classics," and analyzes how Welles tapped into a potentially large audience—and market—with his volumes of *Everybody's Shakespeare* and radio broadcasts and Mercury Theatre recordings of plays by Shakespeare, endeavors that were shrewd (although ultimately not all that profitable) business decisions as well as sincere attempts to educate a new generation away from materialism and toward poetry, theater, and, later, creative cinema.

Individual initiative does not always coincide with enabling historical moment, though, and it wasn't long before Welles's efforts were out of phase with cultural conditions. Anderegg's overview chapter, "Welles/Shakespeare/Film," reveals how his ambitious attempt to bring a vital and in some ways radical "Shakespeare from the Provinces" to the people foundered in an era when mass media were increasingly redirected to more profit-generating and non-intellectual entertainment, with Olivier left as the proper custodian of Shakespeare on film. The following chapters then examine "the extent to which the meaning and significance of each [of Welles's Shakespearean films] are intimately tied to the circumstances in which it was produced, distributed, exhibited, and received" (73). This approach, usually heralded as an antidote to auteurism, in fact supplements and reinvigorates our understanding of Welles as an auteur by providing an intimate view of the details and contexts of his creative artistry, an artistry that only a naïve critic would separate from the force of circumstances.

Anderegg skillfully outlines the many vectors at work in the making of *Macbeth,* illustrating how the film's bleak landscape, alienation effects, and deglamorized portraits of evil and brutality derive as much from his "B"-picture budget as from Brecht's theories, the postwar milieu, and Shakespeare's text. *Othello* provides an even better example of how Welles, since he could not control circumstances, presided over accidents, but for all of his success in crafting a powerful film about fragmentation from an utterly fragmented and chaotic production environment, it "presented another puzzling cultural object for American viewers to negotiate" (109). The last in Welles's trilogy, *Chimes at Midnight,* considered by many to be his most accomplished and satisfying Shakespearean film, fared no better in its reception, and Anderegg insightfully analyzes many of its dispiriting postmodern aspects, subtly underscoring the unfortunate irony that the film's lament—for a lost or abandoned dream of effectual human "physicality" triumphing over cynical rhetoric and political manipulation—is as much for Welles himself and his own age as for the passing of Falstaff.

Anderegg is no facile apologist for Welles, but his approach implicitly, and convincingly, defends Welles from recurrent charges that personal deficiencies (such as uncontrollable egotism, fear of completion, and a willingness to sell out for short-term money and celebrity status) lie behind what is often somewhat simplistically labeled the downward spiral of his career and the failure of his works. By situating Welles in a broad context, Anderegg redefines

Welles's career and his "failure," highlighting the ambitiousness of what should be taken as his cultural and not merely personal work, and increasing our awareness of the resistant, if not antagonistic, conditions that rendered his goal of reconciling high and low, of unifying America via an art dynamized by Shakespeare, unlikely, if not impossible. Still, this goal, pursued in so many ways throughout his life, should place Welles at the center of the "Cinema of Democracy"—although inexplicably and indefensibly he garners not a single substantive mention in Sam B. Girgus's interesting recent book with that subtitle—and Anderegg brilliantly demonstrates that when we understand the complexities and nuances of Welles playing Shakespeare, we go a long way toward understanding not only a perpetually fascinating and important artist, "arguably, the premier American Shakespearean of the twentieth century" (166), but also some of the tensions and failures of twentieth-century America.

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Passionate Views

Film, Cognition, and Emotion

Edited by Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999. $49.95 cloth; $17.95 paper.

One of the most interesting developments in recent film theory is an increased interest in and openness toward ideas about the human mind and human behavior originating in the natural sciences. This approach differs markedly from a social-constructionist view, where the tendency would be to stress the ways science reflects ideology, even prejudice—looking upon science more as a target for demystification than as a source of inspiration. The contributors to *Passionate Views* demonstrate their interest in a reconnection with science, which is not to say that they spurn humanistic learning and scholarship, but rather that they regard themselves as part of the same larger endeavor as their colleagues in various scientific disciplines. They draw on cognitive psychology in particular, but evolutionary biology and neurophysiology are also mentioned in several articles.

The main subject matter of this tightly focused anthology is the importance of the emotions for the experience of cinema. It is apparent that the contributors share a number of basic assumptions about the subject, keeping many of the same problems in view, even though they come from a variety of fields: most are film scholars, but there are also a couple with a background in experimental psychology, and several of the others are professional philosophers (all working within the tradition of analytic philosophy, with its focus on the clarification of concepts). While the contributors' interests do not overlap in all respects, and while they disagree among themselves on a number of points, they still refer repeatedly to one another's work, especially the handful of books that have dealt at length with the issues taken up in the anthology: Noël Carroll's *The Philosophy of Horror* (1990), Murray Smith's *Engaging Characters* (1995), Ed Tan's *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film* (1996), and Torben Grodal's *Moving Pictures* (1997). There is a strong sense of working on a common project with a shared foundation.

A central point is the rejection of the old opposition of emotions and rationality. Emotions are inseparable from cognition; without the guidance of the emotions, we cannot think clearly, evaluate our situation, or engage with our surroundings. An emotional reaction is always linked to something else, it is oriented toward an object; it involves a propensity to act in a particular manner, an "action tendency," and a direction, a "goal orientation" (104). It is the same emotional apparatus that we bring with us into the movie theater, and the emotions that we experience there are everyday emotions.

In *Passionate Views,* moviegoing is thus not described as an activity that is radically discontinuous with the rest of our lives, nor one that engages the psyche in unusual or aberrant ways. Throughout, the articles are dedicated to making un-strange and un-perverse our enjoyment of movies. Psychoanalytically oriented film theory is regarded by nearly all the contributors as their chief opponent, and *Passionate Views* presents itself as a rival, alternative approach. The arguments are forcefully made, and those who favor psychoanalytic theory will have to engage with this book if they still want to be taken seriously.

The succinct introduction by the two editors gives an excellent overview of the issues and the shape of the field. The main body of the book is divided into three parts, each comprising four esssays. The first section, "Kinds of Films, Kinds of Emotion," involves some of the ways in which particular genres can be said to be linked to particular emotions, but also how emotional patterns can be said to group films that do not necessarily belong to an established genre.

Noël Carroll addresses these matters at a general level in his "Films, Emotion, and Genre." Carroll notes the object-orientatation of emotions: certain things must be present in order for particular emotions to arise. The object must meet certain criteria; for instance, if I am to feel fear, I must be confronted with an object or situation that meets the criterion of being harmful. To Carroll, films are "criterially prefocused"; that is, they present us with objects that meet the criteria linked to relevant emotions. Monsters, for instance, appear in horror movies, and they are harmful by definition. In addition, spectators are typically encouraged to be concerned about what happens to characters, to take a "pro attitude" towards certain characters and story developments, which gives direction to the emotions.

Ed Tan and Nico Frijda write about sentimental emotions in their article, "Sentiment in Film Viewing." They point out that "sentimental" is often used in a derogatory way to mean excessive, disproportionate, unearned; it is "associated with weakness and femininity in a sense hostile to women" (49). They distance themselves from this view, insisting that "the sentimental is a true emotional variant" (55). Accord-

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ing to Frijda's theory of the emotions, an emotion is always linked to an action tendency, in this case, "to yield to the overwhelming." Tan and Frijda refuse to condemn this embracing of helplessness, though they acknowledge that it can be "embarrasing." This account should be of great interest to anyone writing on the melodrama.

In "The Sublime in Cinema," Cynthia A. Freeland investigates Kant's philosophical concept of the sublime, relating it to studies of the emotions by cognitive psychologists (sensibly leaving aside the ruminations of Lyotard, Derrida, and Žižek). She discusses three films in detail, *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (Dreyer, 1928), *Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes* (Herzog, 1972), and *Les Enfants du paradis* (Carné, 1945). She describes these as sublime in their entirety "not just because [they prompt] deep emotions but because those emotions are linked to moral reflection" (79). To explain this complexity, she argues, is an important challenge for cognitive theory.

Dirk Eitzen argues for a functionalist understanding of humor in his article, "The Emotional Basis of Film Comedy." He acknowledges that there are a number of different accounts of how comedy works: there are "tension-relief" theories, "incongruity-resolution" theories (which argue that humor arises from unexpected solutions to puzzling situations), and "superiority" theories (which explain humor as a socially acceptable sort of aggression). These are difficult to reconcile with one another, but Eitzen argues that a comprehensive explanation would have to be based on the function or functions humor could have had for our evolutionary ancestors.

The second section is entitled "Film Technique, Film Narrative, and Emotion," and the four essays here link the study of emotions in film with narratological ideas. A key work in the development of the study of film narrative is David Bordwell's *Narration in the Fiction Film* from 1985, and its influence is evident here. Bordwell's book was also important in calling attention to some of the ways that cognitive theory could inspire and enrich film theory.

It is within this framework that Greg Smith, in "Local Emotions, Global Moods, and Film Structure," argues that character and action have received too much attention at the expense of style. In his view, the emotional high points of a film must be seen in the context of the general mood of the film. Moods are often generated less by narratively prominent features such as the characters and more by non-person elements, of which music is given particular attention.

Film music is investigated in more detail in Jeff Smith's article, "Movie Music as Moving Music." He usefully outlines various competing theories of the emotional effects of music, including those inspired by analytical philosophy, by cognitive science, and by psychoanalysis. He then proceeds to examine how well they can help us in understanding the highly complex phenomenon of film music and its dramatic functions, of which Jeff Smith emphasizes "the signification of characters' emotions, the communication of an overall mood, and the arousal of emotional responses in audiences" (167).

Of all the contributors to the volume, Torben Grodal is probably the one who goes furthest in his attempt to integrate film theory with a scientific understanding of human nature. In "Emotions, Cognitions, and Narrative Patterns in Films," he emphasizes the embodiedness of the human mind and the importance of the evolutionary history of the human species for the understanding of the ways in which film spectators respond to the images on the screen.

Susan L. Feagin's essay is about timing, that is, the relative duration of particular elements of the film—as opposed to sequencing, the order of story elements. While recognizing that the emotional impact of a particular sequence may be due to its content, not the timing of its elements, Feagin insists on the importance of the latter to our appreciation of films.

The last section, called "Desire, Identification, and Empathy," contains four essays concerned with the response of spectators to film characters. Gregory Currie takes up the concept of desire, but does not at all concern himself with gratification (sexual or otherwise), or other features of psychoanalytically inspired accounts. He distinguishes between character desire and narrative desire: the first has to do with the spectator wanting something to happen to a character, whereas the second concerns the spectator's desire that the *narrative* have a particular outcome, which allows the spectator to know about this outcome. This pattern is also observable in real life, Currie contends; real-life narrative desire is that shown by Jane Austen's character Emma, for instance, who tries to script the romantic lives of her friends.

In "Identification and Emotion in Narrative Film," Berys Gaut presents a defense of the concept of identification, which has been strongly criticized by several other contributors to *Passionate Views*. These criticisms have mainly been directed at theories of identification that invoke psychoanalysis; Gaut is by no means trying to resurrect those theories, but he believes that identification need not be jettisoned along with psychoanalysis. Gaut distinguishes between different sorts of identification; one is imaginative: " . . . what I do in imaginatively identifying myself with Jeeves is imagining being in his situation, doing what he does, feeling what he does, and so on" (203). In empathetic identification, the spectator doesn't just imagine what the character feels, but shares the actual feeling. This is again distintinct from sympathetic identification, which is a question of care and concern (if we know of impending danger, we may fear for the character rather share his soon-to-be-shattered contentment).

Gaut also discusses how these types of identification may be elicited through various cinematic devices. Gregory Currie and Murray Smith have argued strongly against equating character subjectivity with point-of-view shots, and Gaut does not dispute Smith's very important observation that "the point-of-view shot in horror films often functions to disguise the killer's identity" (204), an observation that makes quite a number of writings on horror films look highly dubious. Nevertheless, Gaut tries to get around this by separating imaginative identification into a perceptual aspect (how things look to a character), an affective aspect (how she feels about events), an epistemic one (what she believes about them), and so on. While Gaut's account is clear and sharply drawn, one may question whether the distinctions are in fact as

evident as he makes them out to be. Both Murray Smith and Carl Plantinga prefer to get rid of the concept of identification because it carries too many misleading connotations.

In Murray Smith's essay, "Gangsters, Cannibals, Aesthetes, or Apparently Perverse Allegiances," he discusses the implications of rooting for the bad guys. Smith distinguishes between apparently perverse allegiance, which means that spectatators sympathize with bad guys *despite* their odious traits, and genuinely perverse allegiance, where they sympathize with them *because* of their odious traits. Smith suggests that it is very unusual for films to actively solicit the latter. As an example, he takes Dr. Hannibal Lecter from *The Silence of the Lambs*: he has been given various attractive qualities that encourage audiences to feel a certain sneaky admiration for him, *despite* our knowledge that he is a homicidal maniac—but we certainly are not meant to admire him *because* he is a cannibal.

Finally, Carl Plantinga's "The Scene of Empathy and the Human Face on Film" discusses the power of faces (especially when seen in extended close-ups) to not only reveal to spectators what a character is feeling, but to elicit the same feeling in the spectator. Plantinga draws on psychological research that suggests that vividly emotional facial displays can be contagious: spectators will involuntary mimic the expressions they see and feel some of the same emotion. Plantinga is careful to note that he's dealing with a "complex process"; in what he calls "scenes of empathy," the powerful, extended view of the human face in close-up is reinforced with other cinematic techniques and a great deal of narrative weight.

Throughout the book, the writing is clear and methodical. A serious tone is maintained, although Carroll clearly take considerable relish in drawing examples from outré horror movies and describing stomach-churning monstrosities in a deadpan style. The philosophically oriented writers have a slightly different style and a slightly different way of going about things (for instance, trying to forsee and rebut even manifestly silly objections to their ideas), but their articles are not overly technical and certainly no more difficult to understand than the other pieces. Verbal pyrotechnics, paradoxes, and elaborate puns are avoided, and it is evident that the intention has been to foreground not the writing, but the theories—and the films that they explain.

All in all, this anthology tries to enrich and deepen the film scholar's experience of movies, not to demystify them and drain her enjoyment of them away. In her article, Susan Feagin makes the point with great clarity:

> Appreciating a film, experiencing it in richer and fuller ways, involves getting the value out of it, that is, *using* it to do what it is supposed to do. And part of what it is supposed to do will often be to evoke emotions, feelings, moods, and desires, that is, to have those kinds of effects on the human psyche. Thus, part of what needs to be explained in the theoretical account of a film is how certain affective responses contribute to the film's doing what, according to this account, it is supposed to do. (171)

Taking films at face value (so to speak) without surrendering theoretical sophistication is perhaps the most important point of the thought-provoking *Passionate Views*.

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Public Enemies, Public Heroes

Screening the Gangster from *Little Caesar* to *Touch of Evil*

By Jonathan Munby. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. $45.00 cloth; $16.00 paper.

"Gangsters and racketeers play so prominent a part in the American life of today that it would be little short of a miracle if their exploits were ignored by the movies. Nor are they. In fact, the number of films dealing with the underworld and its criminal activities is altogether too great." This observation, from *Our Movie Made Children*, published in 1933, is representative of some of the contemporaneous concerns over violence and representation in American cinema in the early 1930s. Often we tend to forget that the gangster film genre originated from the headlines of Depression-era American newspapers. According to Will Hays, president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, "The gangster cycle was a natural because the gangster cult had been a main theme of journalism for a decade." But there was no tendency in these crime stories to say to the audience, "Go thou and do likewise." Yet many reform-minded groups, such as the Catholic Legion of Decency and numerous state and local censorship boards, vociferously attacked and condemned the gangster genre primarily on the grounds that it *encouraged* identification with gangsterism through its depiction of the material profits of crime. The popularity of this genre, during a time of economic and moral depression, should come as no surprise. Yet, on two occasions (in 1931 and 1935), the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) called for a moratorium on the production of gangster films primarily based, as author Jonathan Munby suggests, on the "fear that the realm of gangsterdom signified the emergence of a world outside the control of the moral and political establishment." It is with the nature of this world and the mediation device of censorship that *Public Enemies, Public Heroes: Screening the Gangster from Little Caesar to Touch of Evil* is concerned.

Munby's book examines "the symbiotic relationship of the American crime film to censorship between 1929 and 1958—from the Crash and the birth of the first controversial talking gangsters to the putative swan song of film noir, *Touch of Evil*." Munby, who teaches in the Programme in American Studies at Lancaster University, suggests that the gangster was a byproduct of modernity and urbanization. As such he represents "the unacceptable face of a growing and transforming mass culture"—a culture which had become increasingly different from the Anglo-Saxon Protestant cultural

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hegemony that had dominated much of American life. The urban ethnic gangster posed a definite threat to the concept of the idealized homogeneous "American," which was not a hyphenated one. Munby traces this conflict from the Volstead Act, which ushered in Prohibition (which he sees as an attempt to control the new consumer culture with the Puritan ethic), and the numerous immigration acts instituted during the 1920s with the concomitant rise of the gangster. The emergence of the gangster as a cultural hero through his representation in the mass media—especially film—was a cause for alarm for many reform organizations, which sought censorship as a means of controlling the potentially volatile imagery and ideology being presented on the screen.

The ethnicity and "otherness" of the gangster was further exacerbated by the arrival of the sound film. In the silent era, the gangster was represented as a social threat, the product of the urban slums. "While these films encoded gangsterdom as an exciting taboo world, they did not ultimately disturb fundamental oppositions that guaranteed the bourgeois order." Films such as *The Exciters* (1923), *Come Across* (1928), and *Alibi* (1929) portrayed the underworld as an exotic, seductive environment replete with forbidden pleasures—alcohol, sex, and wealth. The talking gangster film, however, accentuated the threat to nativism. As Munby notes, what made the gangster triad, *Little Caesar* (1930), *Public Enemy* (1930), and *Scarface* (1932), "so different from anything that had come before was that their protagonists spoke in ethnic urban vernacular voices." Sound, Munby argues, helped expose "the cultural prejudice" of censorship in the 1930s.

Public Enemies, Public Heroes is divided into two sections. Chapters 1 to 4 examine the early gangster film in relationship to censorship by the Production Code Administration. Munby sees this relationship as a mediation on the part of the PCA in order to police Hollywood product. "In many ways," he contends, " the Production Code functioned as a prop to conservative ideals, both Protestant and Catholic." Films such as *Little Caesar* and *Scarface* challenged the traditional and idealized concepts of American life through their representation of the ignored social inequalities of the ethnic urban lower class. Munby thus regards censorship as a "product of the volatile relationship between mass culture and the status quo." The first section of his book displays his best arguments. By utilizing films such as *Little Caesar*, *Manhattan Melodrama,* and *You Only Live Once*, Munby shows how the gangster film genre was mutated and transformed through the strictures placed upon it by the moral guardians of the Production Code Administration. Unlike the early ethnicity-oriented gangster films, films from 1935 (post-gangster moratorium) onward depicted the gangster as either a fugitive outlaw (*The Petrified Forest, You Only Live Once*), a peripheral character (*Marked Woman, Dead End*), or a split/shared protagonist in the narrative (*Manhattan Melodrama, Angels with Dirty Faces*). The gangster was no longer the titled anti-hero or, even more importantly, the ethnic urban threat of the triad of films that gave rise to his popularity in the early 1930s.

It is in the second half of his book that Munby treads on weaker ground. Chapters 5 to 7 examine the development of another dissident crime cycle, the film noir. Again Munby suggests that this cycle arose from the impact of censorship forces in the motion picture industry. Munby claims that a more politically oriented censorship, rather than the moral policing efforts of the PCA, developed from World War II into the postwar era of liberal consensus. The negative, pessimistic mood associated with film noir and the stark imagery reflecting the social realities of postwar America in such films as *Body and Soul, Brute Force*, and *Asphalt Jungle* were detrimental to the now global image of the United States. As Munby states, "The crime film's social realist visions of urban realities constantly interfered with the desires of both liberal consensus advocates and the fanatical right to turn Hollywood into an agent of political affirmation." But much the same can be said of other films and genres during the late 1940s. *Pinky, Intruder in the Dust, Home of the Brave, All the King's Men, Gentleman's Agreement, The Snake Pit*, and others, which can hardly be classified as crime films, showed an increased awareness of social and political inequities in postwar America.

Munby, likewise, seems to stretch his argument by utilizing the term "ersatz gangsters" to describe such films as *Brute Force* and *Body and Soul*. He contends that both of these films represent a shift in the metaphor of gangsterdom. Crime films, indeed, but gangster films? More could have been utilized concerning other modifications of the gangster, especially following HUAC and the cycle of films which portrayed the gangster as Communist. Munby is much more sporadic in his selection of examples in this section. In chapter 7, "The 'Un-American' Film Art," the author discusses two German émigré directors, Robert Siodmak and Fritz Lang, in relation to their contributions to the "B" crime film during the 1940s. He is especially interested in the political significance of the émigrés in spinning such dark crime sagas as *Phantom Lady* (Siodmak, 1944), *The Killers* (Siodmak, 1946), and *The Big Heat* (Lang, 1953). Munby compares the political crisis in postwar Hollywood, with regard to HUAC, to a similar crisis in Weimar Germany in the 1920s. He suggests that both Siodmak and Lang were blacklisted because of their "aporia-driven cinema of disillusionment, characterized by a pessimistic psychosocial ambience." By aligning themselves with the crime film genre, the émigré directors "stirred up an old controversy and gave it new life." It would seem from Munby's singling out of Fritz Lang's *The Big Heat* as his one example that Lang, after he was blacklisted, did not make any more crime films. Yet *Human Desire* (1954), *While the City Sleeps* (1955), and *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* (1956) all followed, and are referenced in numerous film noir filmographies.

These few criticisms notwithstanding, Munby's *Public Enemies, Public Heroes: Screening the Gangster from Little Caesar to Touch of Evil* is a worthy and significant contribution to both genre criticism and cultural studies. Too often genre criticism has tended to placate theoretical areas of inquiry without regard to historical contexts. As Rick Altman recently stated in his book *Film/Genre* (1999), "As the byproduct of an extended series of events, a genre must be defined in a manner consistent with the complexity of

an overall situation made up of three-dimensional events spread out over space and time." Jonathan Munby has written an important case study of the gangster film in relation to the mediatory device of censorship and how the genre was affected by historical change. In so doing he has shed additional light on the complexity of film genre theory and criticism.

Ronald W. Wilson teaches in the Department of Theatre and Film at the University of Kansas.

The Red Rooster Scare

Making Cinema American, 1900–1910

By Richard Abel. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999. $40.00 cloth; $19.95 paper.

Those familiar with Richard Abel as the preeminent scholar of French silent cinema may be surprised to see the word "American" in the title of his latest book. Certainly, *The Red Rooster Scare: Making Cinema American, 1900-1910,* which investigates the fortunes of the major French producer Pathé within the pre-feature American film market, marks a departure for Abel in some ways, focussing as it does on patterns of U.S.-based exhibition and trade press discourse. Still, as the author himself points out, he is logically extending the project of his previous book, *The Ciné Goes to Town,* by considering Pathé's domination of the international marketplace and by interrogating "early cinema's inscription within the discursive field of nationalism" (xii), even as he examines both from a different perspective. And while Abel's current history involves terrain more familiar to North American readers interested in early cinema than his earlier work, incorporating resources ranging from ads for Midwestern nickelodeons to reviews from *Variety* and *Moving Picture World,* the same exhaustive and painstaking approach to research and historiographical method which has become a hallmark of this scholar's work distinguishes every page of *The Red Rooster Scare.*

Abel's thesis—that Pathé's initial strength as a producer challenged American companies for supremacy and forced eventual retaliation in the form of trade press-based attacks on Pathé's films—seems simple enough, but gains power from his exemplary method of proving his point. He contends that Pathé's centrality to the development of early cinema in America has been overlooked, resulting in a distortion of the contours of the marketplace for the period he covers. In order to establish Pathé's prominence, Abel undertakes a reconsideration of some long-held assumptions concerning early cinema's fortunes in the U.S. Of special interest is the contention that a commercial crisis occurred within the nascent industry around 1900, resulting in audience dissatisfaction and declining productivity. Abel counters this assertion, most often associated with the compelling scholarship of Charles Musser, by reviving Robert Allen's focus on vaudeville as a dependable site for filmed entertainment during this period and showing how the provision of an exhibition service to vaudeville proved mutually beneficial. Key to this development, according to Abel, was the sustained popularity of the *féeries* of Méliès and Pathé (often available through duped versions sold by American companies), which he reconstructs by scouring advertisements and vaudeville managers' reports. Abel then links the innovative production and distribution strategies developed by Pathé soon thereafter to the emergence of the nickelodeons in order to solidify his claims that the French company had a firmer sense of market-based needs than its American competitors. Finally, Abel attributes Pathé's demise as North America's preeminent supplier of motion pictures to the combined efforts of MPPC-generated regulations and a campaign by the trade press to disparage Pathé product for its inability to embody an increasingly privileged "American-ness."

Clearly the last part of this argument rests at the heart of Abel's thesis. Not content with providing "simply a history of the Pathé company in the United States," Abel wants to offer "something more like a cultural history of our own cinema's nationalization" (xiii). As much as the foreign presence of Pathé needed to be expunged to allow U.S.-based companies to reclaim their own market, Abel contends, so too did immigrant movie audiences need to be acculturated and remade into a mass viewership conceived according to a model of idealised American values. For Abel, the struggle over Pathé symbolizes a "crisis of anxiety" (xii) regarding the audience for the company's films, seen at once as neither sufficiently assimilated nor appropriately receptive to a "masculinized aesthetic of authenticity" (126). Accordingly, the dethroning of Pathé stands in for the pivotal moment in American film history when cinema ceased to function as an alternative public space for its audiences and when textual address moved progressively toward a univocal and hierarchically gendered model. Indebted to the work of Miriam Hansen and a clutch of cultural historians, Abel's argument here is ambitious, but not entirely convincing. To assert, as Abel does, that the undoing of Pathé represents a significant step in the "Americanization" of filmmaking and filmgoing in the United States, possesses a certain logic; Pathé's loss of market share did coincide with the growth of the Independent movement and the establishment of a domestically distinct mode of cinematic practice. But Abel is not content to leave the matter there and wishes to see Pathé's struggles as a "defining moment of modernity" (xiii). This lacks the persuasiveness of many of his other arguments, in part because the nebulous term "modernity" has come to be overused as a catchall for any kind of change to cultural activity. But beyond that, Abel's conscientious approach to documentation is stretched when forced to bolster what are on some level unprovable claims. In effect, Abel invests the declining fortunes of Pathé with too much cultural significance, which, in turn, produces certain questionable emphases. Most obvious is the inordinate weight given to exhibition in his account. As important as a fuller portrait of exhibition and reception may be to our sense of early cinema's functions and importance, as a means of explaining

an overall situation made up of three-dimensional events spread out over space and time." Jonathan Munby has written an important case study of the gangster film in relation to the mediatory device of censorship and how the genre was affected by historical change. In so doing he has shed additional light on the complexity of film genre theory and criticism.

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Abel's thesis—that Pathé's initial strength as a producer challenged American companies for supremacy and forced eventual retaliation in the form of trade press-based attacks on Pathé's films—seems simple enough, but gains power from his exemplary method of proving his point. He contends that Pathé's centrality to the development of early cinema in America has been overlooked, resulting in a distortion of the contours of the marketplace for the period he covers. In order to establish Pathé's prominence, Abel undertakes a reconsideration of some long-held assumptions concerning early cinema's fortunes in the U.S. Of special interest is the contention that a commercial crisis occurred within the nascent industry around 1900, resulting in audience dissatisfaction and declining productivity. Abel counters this assertion, most often associated with the compelling scholarship of Charles Musser, by reviving Robert Allen's focus on vaudeville as a dependable site for filmed entertainment during this period and showing how the provision of an exhibition service to vaudeville proved mutually beneficial. Key to this development, according to Abel, was the sustained popularity of the *féeries* of Méliès and Pathé (often available through duped versions sold by American companies), which he reconstructs by scouring advertisements and vaudeville managers' reports. Abel then links the innovative production and distribution strategies developed by Pathé soon thereafter to the emergence of the nickelodeons in order to solidify his claims that the French company had a firmer sense of market-based needs than its American competitors. Finally, Abel attributes Pathé's demise as North America's preeminent supplier of motion pictures to the combined efforts of MPPC-generated regulations and a campaign by the trade press to disparage Pathé product for its inability to embody an increasingly privileged "American-ness."

Clearly the last part of this argument rests at the heart of Abel's thesis. Not content with providing "simply a history of the Pathé company in the United States," Abel wants to offer "something more like a cultural history of our own cinema's nationalization" (xiii). As much as the foreign presence of Pathé needed to be expunged to allow U.S.-based companies to reclaim their own market, Abel contends, so too did immigrant movie audiences need to be acculturated and remade into a mass viewership conceived according to a model of idealised American values. For Abel, the struggle over Pathé symbolizes a "crisis of anxiety" (xii) regarding the audience for the company's films, seen at once as neither sufficiently assimilated nor appropriately receptive to a "masculinized aesthetic of authenticity" (126). Accordingly, the dethroning of Pathé stands in for the pivotal moment in American film history when cinema ceased to function as an alternative public space for its audiences and when textual address moved progressively toward a univocal and hierarchically gendered model. Indebted to the work of Miriam Hansen and a clutch of cultural historians, Abel's argument here is ambitious, but not entirely convincing. To assert, as Abel does, that the undoing of Pathé represents a significant step in the "Americanization" of filmmaking and filmgoing in the United States, possesses a certain logic; Pathé's loss of market share did coincide with the growth of the Independent movement and the establishment of a domestically distinct mode of cinematic practice. But Abel is not content to leave the matter there and wishes to see Pathé's struggles as a "defining moment of modernity" (xiii). This lacks the persuasiveness of many of his other arguments, in part because the nebulous term "modernity" has come to be overused as a catchall for any kind of change to cultural activity. But beyond that, Abel's conscientious approach to documentation is stretched when forced to bolster what are on some level unprovable claims. In effect, Abel invests the declining fortunes of Pathé with too much cultural significance, which, in turn, produces certain questionable emphases. Most obvious is the inordinate weight given to exhibition in his account. As important as a fuller portrait of exhibition and reception may be to our sense of early cinema's functions and importance, as a means of explaining

how (if not why) Pathé was dislodged from its position of preeminence it emerges as unsatisfactory. Abel's laudable attention to heretofore unexplored areas of exhibition history sometimes causes him to underestimate those instances when production and distribution can tell us as much and even more. For example, the short section Abel devotes to the MPPC's maneuvres in limiting Pathé's market share offers a far more compelling explanation of how the company was supplanted than the extensive treatment he accords the trade press's realignment of Pathé's image in the late nickelodeon era. And I think Abel is forced to underplay the rather contradictory posture of the trade press at this time (on many matters beyond its handling of Pathé) in order to make his point. Moreover, the Pathé-centrism of his account, while justified for the most part, does result in some puzzling lacunae, such as why the decline of Méliès, a company so prominent in the first chapter, is buried in a footnote two chapters later. Finally, Abel's reluctance to explore why Pathé did not make stronger attempts to resist the efforts to limit its power within the market, coupled with his theses on social control, produce the unfortunate impression that Pathé (and the immigrant audiences watching its films) were little more than hapless foreign victims, a portrait which lacks the complexity cultural history ideally offers.

But my issues with some of the book's strategies are ultimately superceded by my admiration for its historiographical rigour overall. Not only does Abel provide a compellingly detailed account of how exhibition functioned across different parts of the continent during the decade in question, he also manages to incorporate an abundance of original documents which sometimes underscore and other times complement his main theses. Moreover, each chapter ends with an "entr'acte" covering an aspect of the cinema during this time that Abel could not easily integrate into his main narrative (from the function of color in Pathé's films to the use of music in the nickelodeon), all of which enrich the text while also providing inspiration for historians on the lookout for "subjects for further research." I see the inclusion of this material as a mark of the generosity of Abel as a scholar—rather than hoarding these subjects for later works, he presents them for others to develop. This generosity is also signalled by the voluminous endnotes, which total nearly as many pages as the main text. Few historians are as disciplined and as evenhanded as Abel (even when he disagrees with another scholar he does so with grace and diplomacy), and this latest work will only enhance his reputation. While I may not agree with all facets of the argument put forward in *The Red Rooster Scare,* I salute the book's achievement as a model of how film history should be written: the sheer wealth of historically rich material Richard Abel provides, his elegant handling of its various intricacies, and his engagement with the ongoing historiographical issues informing early cinema research commend it to anyone interested in studying the craft of one of our discipline's most accomplished historians.

Charlie Keil teaches at the University of Toronto.

Representing

Hip Hop Culture and the Production of Black Cinema

By S. Craig Watkins. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. $30.00 cloth; $17.00 paper.

In *Representing*, S. Craig Watkins steps into long-standing, heated debates about the nature of Black images in film armed with a fresh set of social and political questions as well as a sharp, narrow historical focus. Watkins describes recent African-American commercial filmmaking—from the emergence of Spike Lee in 1986 to the cycle of "ghetto action films" directed by John Singleton, Matty Rich, and the Hughes brothers during the early 1990s—in light of contradictions surrounding the representation of Black urban youth in a number of contemporary public discourses.

The book explores some of the ways in which the expressive cultures of Black youth (particularly hip hop) have influenced not only Black filmmaking but the face of American popular culture in general as well. Watkins reads this phenomenon not as an entirely negative, exploitative commodification of Black youth cultural practices but, rather, as a means by which Black youth intervene in a social world that provides few other avenues for their political or creative expression. Watkins mobilizes a wide array of evidence—including sociological studies, political and economic history, media analysis, journalism, institutional film history, and his own close readings of particular films—to effectively demonstrate how images of Black youth (in films created by African Americans as well as in other media and in the popular American imagination) are constructed by multiple and often conflicting discourses on race, class, generation, gender, and sexuality, and by major shifts in commercial image-making in the post-industrial U.S. Watkins makes a valuable contribution to Black film criticism by moving beyond the familiar and limiting evaluative binaries of "positive" vs. "negative," or "realistic" vs. "unrealistic" Black media images. Instead, he explores the complex relationships between Black youth and the American popular mediascape, and offers a nuanced discussion of the ideological underpinnings and political implications of some of the most highly visible modes of contemporary Black representation.

The first part of the book sets the stage for a discussion of late twentieth-century Black filmmaking by sketching out the social, political, and media landscapes in which constructions of Blackness are produced and circulated. For example, in the opening chapter Watkins describes how social conservatives have constructed Black youth as poster children for urban crime, drugs, unwed pregnancy, welfare dependency, and, by extension, the moral decline of American civilization. He traces how a right-wing backlash against gains won by people of color and women during the civil rights movement was popularized by Reaganism during the 1980s through appeals to nostalgic, "commonsense" notions of law and order, family values, and patriotism. By characterizing

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poor urban Blacks as responsible for the decline of their own communities (rather than pointing to larger economic factors such as rapid deindustrialization and the attendant decline in inner-city employment), social conservatives could disguise the devastation wrought by institutional racism and "invert cause and effect." They blamed a deviant "culture of poverty" for the ills of urban America and waged a "war on drugs" against Black victims of social and economic disinvestment. These tactics, Watkins argues, were consistently contested by African Americans, most notably Black youth, who developed strategies to counter their demonization in American popular discourses.

This leads to the book's central contradiction: At a moment when Black urban youth disproportionately face poverty, unemployment, AIDS, and incarceration, and consistently find themselves targeted by right-wing backlash, their expressive cultures are becoming increasingly visible and desirable in a corporate-controlled popular culture market. Watkins explores this contradiction in the second chapter by tracing the web of complexities that characterize the relationships between young urban Blacks and capitalism. On one hand, late capitalism has produced conditions that impoverish Black urban communities and has facilitated the construction and dissemination of "crisis discourses" about a dangerous Black urban underclass. On the other hand, commercial forms of popular culture (Watkins cites music, video, film, television, advertising, and sports) draw heavily on Black youth culture and place them at the center of American media and commodities circulated to a global market. Watkins also recognizes that the capitalist dream of individual wealth is a central ethos of hip hop culture, citing the routine boasting about cash and the commodities it affords (cars, clothes, jewelry, and women) in rap records and music videos. Thus Watkins reveals that Black youth are not simply victims of exploitative, white-controlled media corporations; they are also implicated in the commodification of their expressive cultures, insisting on "getting paid" for their innovative labors in the realms of music (rappers, DJs, record producers), dance, fashion, publishing, and film in a more aggressive manner than previous generations of Black artists and entrepreneurs.

In what is perhaps the book's boldest claim, Watkins argues that hip hop is an improbable but highly successful "social movement" in which Black youth use their "unprecedented access to the technologies of communication media" to effect social change via "style, performance, opposition, leisure, consumption, representation, and entrepreneurship" (62, 65). Watkins persuasively argues that the current explosion and vitality of Black youth cultural practices grows out of their keen recognition of the power and profitability of mass media. What is less clear, though, is how widespread and profound this access to mass media really is for the majority of young urban Blacks. Certainly, many young Black artists and entrepreneurs have gleaned tremendous profits by taking advantage of new technologies of production and distribution (from sampling machines to digital video effects to the Internet), which have increased the popularity and marketability of hip hop culture. And the "imagined community" that hip hop has developed through electronic media has placed African-American youth culture on an international stage and enabled individuals to interact across ethnic and national boundaries. But numerous recent studies have shown that Black urban youth have much less access to computers and the Internet than their white counterparts. In addition, those young Blacks who participate directly in the commercial realms of cultural production (making records, videos, magazines, films) are small in number. This is not to say that the everyday practices and performances of Black youth do not constitute a significant form of cultural production or an effective social movement. Rather, I think Watkins could have strengthened his claim by devoting more attention to the ways in which Black youth assert their agency through consumption—that is, how they have recognized and used the power of their consumer choices and practices (i.e., what products they purchase, what media they prefer and have ready access to) to intervene in the realm of popular culture. The experiences of Black youth as consumers, along with their activities as producers, have influenced mainstream trends and provided this constituency with an unprecedented sense of pleasure and empowerment as they see their tastes and practices addressed and reflected in a media landscape that would otherwise misrepresent or ignore them entirely.

After establishing the creative confidence and agency Black youth have achieved via hip hop culture, Watkins turns in the third chapter to a consideration of how hip hop culture has affected Black filmmaking in the 1980s and 1990s. Watkins traces key transformations in commercial filmmaking, distribution, and exhibition (particularly after the fall of the Hollywood studio system), and how these changes have shaped modes of American and African-American filmmaking—from race movies during segregation to the blaxploitation period of the 1970s to the "L.A. Rebellion" of the 1970s and 80s to the emergence of successful "commercial independent" Black directors like Spike Lee. Watkins outlines how the dismantling of vertical integration, increased competition from television, white flight from urban centers, and the growth of exhibition sites (multiplexes, cable, home video), among other factors, have created a more decentralized, flexible, and diverse American film scene in terms of production budgets, film content, distribution strategies, and target audiences. Most significant in Watkins' account is "the maturation of a more robust independent film movement" (87), which has provided filmmakers working outside of the studio system (by choice or by default) not only greater creative freedom but also a host of independent distributors and exhibition venues (e.g., festivals) dedicated to presenting "independent" cinema to a growing audience seeking bold, distinctive film product. Black and youth markets were among those increasingly targeted by the independent film movement, and a new cadre of filmmakers rose to prominence by incorporating their expressive forms and catering to their tastes (e.g., featuring rap music in their soundtracks).

Here again, the question of agency proves to be a complicated one in Watkins' analysis. Do filmmakers and the Black youth they represent/appropriate from/address participate and benefit equally when hip hop elements are showcased in feature films? If the film industry is invigorated by the "fresh" styles and niche markets opened up by hip hop culture, how exactly do the Black youth creators of this culture use these cinematic moments of exposure and commodification to redefine themselves and effect social change (let alone profit materially)? Although Watkins is careful to outline the many industrial and cultural shifts and conditions that enable Black "commercial independent" filmmakers like Spike Lee to form their own production companies and to distribute their films widely (i.e., to "react to and exploit a rapidly changing social world" [103]), he is less specific about how Black youth, with their increased access to "an ever-expanding popular media landscape," use their sophisticated media literacy to develop "a different view of themselves, their social world, and their role within that world as active makers of history rather than passive victims of history" (103). Locating agency and measuring impact are incredibly difficult tasks in relation to cinema and popular culture, particularly when considering elusive and multivarious reception practices. Perhaps this is why Watkins privileges the conditions and processes of media *production* in his exploration of Black cultural and representational politics. As a result, though, when Watkins turns to a close reading of contemporary Black film practice, the activities of individual young filmmakers such as Lee, John Singleton, Matty Rich, and Allan and Albert Hughes come to stand in for the insurgent communities of Black youth foregrounded in the early chapters of the book.

In the second part of the book, devoted to the career and representational strategies of Spike Lee, Watkins does an excellent job of situating Lee within the development of African-American cinema as well as the independent film boom of the mid-1980s. Earlier periods in Black film history boast aggressive, outspoken Black entrepreneurs who targeted an underserved Black segment of the moviegoing audience even in the face of severe institutional and social limitations (e.g., Oscar Micheaux, Melvin Van Peebles). However, Spike Lee took advantage of a dramatic increase in the value of racially inflected content and, significantly, the value of a Black auteur's voice in the increasingly diverse and competitive media marketplace of the mid-1980s. These conditions enabled Lee (and later his successors) to use a rhetoric of independence and Black audience specialization to enhance his symbolic capital. As Watkins illustrates in the fourth chapter, Lee's ability to make low-budget films turn high profits moved him from the margins of American filmmaking to a central role in the commercial film industry. Though Lee has struggled with Hollywood throughout his career over the budgets, content, and marketing of his films (as Watkins thoroughly illustrates with Lee's production costs and notes, box-office reports, test screening results, and media attention), his career has consistently pushed boundaries and paved new roads for Black participation in American commercial film production. Watkins' meticulous account of Lee's ascendance to Black cultural commentator and icon of African-American filmmaking is one of the major contributions of this book.

In the fifth chapter, Watkins continues his discussion of Lee with an analysis of how he has deployed racial themes to respond to white conservative constructions of Blackness and to establish his unique authorial style and voice. Building on Wahneema Lubiano's incisive critique of what she terms "the Spike Lee discourse," Watkins examines how Lee uses the tools of the cinematic apparatus ("sound, movement, camera angles, editing, character development, and story-plot" [138]) to engage with and revise dominant discourses on Black life. Although Watkins' close readings of Lee's stylistic techniques become mechanical at times ("In film, music is often used to convey meaning and/or establish mood" [153]), he is convincing when he describes how films like *School Daze* (1988), *Do the Right Thing* (1989) and *Jungle Fever* (1991) use a variety of formal and narrative strategies to reveal and interrogate divisions within the Black community (e.g., class, color, and gender hierarchies), to question simplistic formulations of Black identity, and to critique "whiteness" from a Black point of view. Watkins rightly points out that "one of the most striking aspects of the Spike Lee Discourse is that the filmmaker oftentimes mistakes putting a social problem on cinematic display for a form of critique in and of itself" (143). However, Watkins demonstrates how many aspects of Lee's highly stylized film practice (such as his frequent use of the anti-classical device of direct address) exposed audiences to racial issues in new and engaging ways, and opened a space for more formulaic representations of Black life by African-American directors.

Lee's immediate legacy is the subject of the third and last part of the book, which describes the emergence of the cycle of "ghetto action films" released during the early 1990s. In the sixth chapter, Watkins carefully describes the intersecting social, political, and industrial conditions that gave rise to these films and their reception. In this case, the hip hop culture tapped by Spike Lee's use of Public Enemy's rap anthem "Fight the Power," in *Do the Right Thing*, is exploited much more broadly in films that focus on ghetto youth and their "menacing" presence in the urban American landscape. As "gangsta rap" artists and entrepreneurs (like NWA, Suge Knight, Dr. Dre, and Snoop Doggy Dogg) popularized explicit lyrics about ghetto life, the film industry seized the opportunity to appropriate rap's "hard core" ethos in purportedly "realistic" urban action films replete with sexual and violent content. Films like John Singleton's *Boyz N the Hood* (1991), Matty Rich's *Straight Out of Brooklyn* (1991), Mario Van Peebles' *New Jack City* (1991), and the Hughes brothers' *Menace II Society* (1993) were big box-office successes—made for relatively low budgets but reaping large profits from a newly targeted Black urban youth market. More importantly, these films proliferated because they appealed to crossover white youth and international markets "titillated with and primed for action-oriented narratives about the deterioration of America's inner cities" (175).

Ghetto action films did not simply draw on hip hop culture in their use of rap music soundtracks and rapper/actors intended to make "Black films" appeal to a broad audience base. As Watkins explains in the final chapter, these films display hip hop's distinctive evocation of the contours of post-industrial ghetto life and its critique of mass-circulated Black images across various media, giving Black youth a platform from which to comment on their social world. But the "ghettocentric imagination" articulated in these films also contains hip hop's often troubling, essentialist ideologies which militate against their oppositional impulses. For example, Watkins describes how *Menace II Society* and *Boyz N the Hood* adapt cinematic techniques (e.g., the gangster genre, flashbacks, layered soundtracks) to powerfully illustrate the social causes and devastating effects of Black urban dislocation and alienation. But these films clearly embrace a patriarchal perspective, prioritizing the experiences of Black men and boys and blaming Black women for the failure of Black families and communities. Thus, when social conservatives like ex-California Governor Pete Wilson and George F. Will praise *Boyz* and *Menace* for their authentic representations of Black urban life, we are left to question the impact of these films (and hip hop culture) in the political and ideological struggles being waged within American popular culture.

This book's account of a recent chapter in Black film history provides an extremely useful model for understanding African-American film practices before and since. For example, the continued impact of hip hop culture in Black filmmaking of the mid and late 1990s can be seen in the success of music video-turned-motion picture directors Hype Williams and F. Gary Gray, as well as in the box-office failure of Black-themed dramas like *Amistad* and *Beloved*, which did not appeal to the youth audiences and ghetto sensibilities that have come to predominate in commercial Black image making. As rap impresarios like Sean "Puffy" Combs and Master P build diverse multimedia empires—from producing and performing in music, videos, and films to investing in restaurants, fashion lines, and toys—we see that vibrant Black youth expressive cultures continue to inspire Black entrepreneurial activity and invigorate commercial media production even as the masses of young urban Blacks continue to be socially, politically, and economically restricted by racist public policies and discourses.

Most of all, Watkins is to be commended for his efforts to highlight the resilient, ever-changing nature of Black youth cultural production and its multiple reverberations through popular culture. The challenging nature of this project is perhaps crystallized in the book's cover illustration—the shirtless back of an anonymous Black male figure. Although this figure certainly captures the always "provocative" nature of the simultaneously "desired and despised" Black body (as explained in a final note on the cover design), it does not necessarily reflect the sensibilities of Black youth self-representation (i.e., the pictured man wears tight-fitting jeans rather than the loose, baggy style of hip hop fashion), and it replicates the short-sighted emphasis on Black masculinity and individuality Watkins identifies in "ghettocentric" discourse. Clearly, the academic publishing industry (like other American culture industries) struggles with the problem of representing the complex ways Black youth resist, interpret, shape, and replicate the commodification of Blackness in their image.

Jacqueline Stewart teaches African-American film and literature at the University of Chicago.

Seven Visions

By Sergei Paradjanov. Los Angeles: Green Integer, 1998. $12.95.

In spite of the growing interest in his work—evidenced by the recent touring retrospective of his films and an exhibition of his collages and drawings at the Armenian Library and Museum of America in Boston—Sergei Paradjanov (1924–1990) is a difficult director to reckon with. As a Soviet director of Armenian origin who was born in Tbilisi, Georgia, and made films in Ukraine, Armenia, and Georgia, his work cuts across cultural boundaries, rendering problematic the Russian-oriented framework of most studies on Soviet cinema. Although he has often been depicted as a martyr to the Soviet state due to difficulties associated with the production and release of his films and his imprisonment for homosexuality during the 1970s, his relationship to the Soviet film industry and political system was far more complex, as we are starting to learn thanks to the increasing availability of primary documents. However, there is still relatively little work published by or about him in English. In that respect, this collection of his scenarios represents an important step in better understanding both Paradjanov and Soviet cinema in general.

The book is a translation (by Guy Bennett) of the 1992 French edition, which was originally translated from Russian by Galia Ackerman and Pierre Lorrain. It presents seven scenarios which Parajanov wrote from 1965 to 1988: *Kiev Frescoes, Intermezzo, Sayat-Nova, The Demon, A Miracle in Odense,* and *Confession*. Both editions include an introduction and annotations by Galia Ackerman. The French edition also includes several color plates of Paradjanov's collages and sketches for his films (albeit occasionally misidentified). The English edition is pocket-sized and lacks the color illustrations.

In the Soviet film industry, literary scenarios of this type were typically submitted as part of the initial stages of gaining approval for the project. Paradjanov's scenarios tend to be impressionistic, with more of an emphasis on gesture and detail than plot and dialogue per se, in keeping with his unique directing style. This approach was by no means typical, as suggested by the official critique of the aborted project *Kiev Frescoes* (1965), a fragmented mosaic of life in Kiev during the 20th anniversary of its liberation from Nazi Germany. Only one scenario in the volume, *Sayat-Nova*, was turned into a completed film by Paradjanov himself—*The Color of*

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Jacqueline Stewart teaches African-American film and literature at the University of Chicago.

Seven Visions

By Sergei Paradjanov. Los Angeles: Green Integer, 1998. $12.95.

In spite of the growing interest in his work—evidenced by the recent touring retrospective of his films and an exhibition of his collages and drawings at the Armenian Library and Museum of America in Boston—Sergei Paradjanov (1924–1990) is a difficult director to reckon with. As a Soviet director of Armenian origin who was born in Tbilisi, Georgia, and made films in Ukraine, Armenia, and Georgia, his work cuts across cultural boundaries, rendering problematic the Russian-oriented framework of most studies on Soviet cinema. Although he has often been depicted as a martyr to the Soviet state due to difficulties associated with the production and release of his films and his imprisonment for homosexuality during the 1970s, his relationship to the Soviet film industry and political system was far more complex, as we are starting to learn thanks to the increasing availability of primary documents. However, there is still relatively little work published by or about him in English. In that respect, this collection of his scenarios represents an important step in better understanding both Paradjanov and Soviet cinema in general.

The book is a translation (by Guy Bennett) of the 1992 French edition, which was originally translated from Russian by Galia Ackerman and Pierre Lorrain. It presents seven scenarios which Parajanov wrote from 1965 to 1988: *Kiev Frescoes, Intermezzo, Sayat-Nova, The Demon, A Miracle in Odense,* and *Confession*. Both editions include an introduction and annotations by Galia Ackerman. The French edition also includes several color plates of Paradjanov's collages and sketches for his films (albeit occasionally misidentified). The English edition is pocket-sized and lacks the color illustrations.

In the Soviet film industry, literary scenarios of this type were typically submitted as part of the initial stages of gaining approval for the project. Paradjanov's scenarios tend to be impressionistic, with more of an emphasis on gesture and detail than plot and dialogue per se, in keeping with his unique directing style. This approach was by no means typical, as suggested by the official critique of the aborted project *Kiev Frescoes* (1965), a fragmented mosaic of life in Kiev during the 20th anniversary of its liberation from Nazi Germany. Only one scenario in the volume, *Sayat-Nova*, was turned into a completed film by Paradjanov himself—*The Color of*

Pomegranates (1969). *Swan Lake: the Zone,* inspired by his prison experiences, was used as the basis for the 1991 feature film by Yuri Ilyenko, the cinematographer for Paradjanov's *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* and a notable director in his own right.

The scenarios are revealing in many respects. First, there is the sheer diversity of subject matter, ranging from the contemporary slice-of-life approach of *Kiev Frescoes* to Hans Christian Andersen fairy tales (*A Miracle in Odense*) and the revolutionary romanticism of *Intermezzo* (an adaptation of a novella by pre-Revolutionary Ukrainian writer Mikhail Kotsiubinsky, best known for *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*). Second, the comparison of a scenario with the finished product can aid in understanding the film itself. *The Color of Pomegranates* is notoriously difficult to decipher; while the literary scenario does not correspond completely with the finished film (understandably, given the many intervening stages in production for any film, to say nothing of the basic problem of translating poetry into cinema), it does clarify details which would escape many viewers, such as the identification of King Irakli during the scene at the Tbilisi baths and the symbolic use of resonator-vessels at the end of the film. Moreover, the structure of the screenplay and its use of verbal repetitions underlines the influence of painting and poetry on the form of the film itself. Third, the scenarios allow us to draw connections across works, to begin to understand Paradjanov's private world of symbols and allusions. For example, the shot of a man pulling a long hair out of his mouth in surviving footage of *Kiev Frescoes* (which has been edited into a 15-minute short) is echoed in the scenario for *Confession,* in which the director finds a golden hair of his ex-wife, Svetlana Shcherbatiuk, in his mouth, "ten years after the divorce" (215). *Confession* is of particular interest as an autobiographical work and a portrait of Tbilisi culture, which is central to understanding Paradjanov's work as a whole.

The scenarios include explanatory footnotes by Galia Ackerman, which are tremendously useful for explaining many of the otherwise obscure cultural references and allusions to Western readers. However, Ackerman's introduction, which provides a brief overview of the director's life and career, contains numerous factual errors and questionable assertions. Referring to the legendary ethnic diversity of Tbilisi, Ackerman writes, "[...] each child spoke three languages: Georgian, Armenian and Azeri [...]" (7). I seriously doubt that "Old Tbilisi" was as idyllically multicultural as *that.* Among other examples, she states that Paradjanov made the documentary short *Hakob Hovnatanian* in 1965, before returning to Kiev to write *Kiev Frescoes.* This is a common error, repeated in other sources such as Patrick Cazals' 1993 book on Paradjanov. In fact, the film (which is undated) was made circa 1967, while he was working on *Sayat-Nova* (*The Color of Pomegranates*)—he is said to have bragged at the time that he was the only film director who could make two films at once. Later, Ackerman claims that Yutkevitch cut *Sayat-Nova* by twenty minutes (13), but the "director's cut" (available on video from Kino) is, at 77 minutes, only a few minutes longer than the Yutkevitch version. Furthermore, *Ashik Kerib* is *not* lacking in camera movements, as Ackerman asserts (16), although it does use them sparingly.

Guy Bennett's translations of the scenarios are for the most part functional, but there are inherent limitations to second-hand translations that he cannot overcome. In *Sayat-Nova,* Ackerman and Lorrain consistently translate "*ashug*" from the Russian text into "*barde*," a generic term which loses the specifically Transcaucasian flavor of the original word (the neutral Russian word for "bard" is "*bard*"). Since Bennett is dependent on the French translation, his own choices as a translator are limited accordingly. It is a pity that he did not work with the original Russian-language texts of the scenarios, most of which have been published in major periodicals such as *Iskusstvo Kino* and are available in U.S. libraries.

Furthermore, his rendering of the French is occasionally problematic, and he even runs into trouble when translating film-related terms. In reference to *Kiev Frescoes,* Bennett's translation reads, "To this collection Paradjanov added the original scenario of *Sayat-Nova* so as to show what this film, made by another director, should have been" (18). The word Bennett translates as "made" is "*monté*," which should have been translated as "edited" or "assembled"; Ackerman is of course referring to the fact that the film was re-edited by Sergei Yutkevitch. Bizarrely, in *Kiev Frescoes* we come across Velasquez's painting of L'Infante Marguerite (the original Russian text reads "Infanta Margarita").

Finally, I would have liked for Ackerman to provide more of a context for the scenarios in the introduction and the prefatory notes. Although they are not without interest as independent creations, literary scenarios are mainly intermediaries toward a final product. In contrast, William Powell and Natasha Synessios's 1999 Faber and Faber edition of Andrei Tarkovsky's *Collected Screenplays* does a better job of describing the function of literary scenarios within the Soviet film production process as a whole. Moreover, it provides detailed background information about each scenario's genesis and makes it clearer what kinds of versions the translators are working with. Indeed, that book serves as a model of what *Seven Visions* could have accomplished. It is a significant book for anyone interested Paradjanov's work or in Soviet cinema in general, but its long-term value is undercut by the relative lack of care behind the editing and translation.

James Steffen is a Ph.D. candidate at Emory University; he is currently writing a dissertation on Sergei Paradjanov.

Thrillers

By Martin Rubin. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999. $59.95 cloth; $18.95 paper.

Martin Rubin's *Thrillers* is a vibrant inaugural entry in Cambridge University Press's "Genres in American Cinema" series. While it may be a bit odd that the series starts with a topic that the author himself believes to fall "between a genre

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proper and a descriptive quality that is attached to other, more clearly defined genres," his understanding of this metagenre and its place in film history effectively warrants a full-length treatment of the thriller.

The series has a clear purpose: "Designed for use as classroom texts, the books will be intellectually rigorous, yet written in a style that is lively and accessible to students and general audiences alike." Rubin has followed this to the letter. The book is easily readable, covers but does not get hampered by previous critical work on the subject, works its way through what the author defines as the Formative, Classical, and Modern periods of the thriller, and then examines five films in detail. This may not be a revolutionary format, but it is a solid structure in which to explore the semi-genre, and one which will surely inform the rest of the series.

For Rubin, the essence of a thriller is in the way it effects the viewer: "The thriller stresses *sensations* more than sensitivity. It is a sensational form." These emotions come in pairs, such as "humor *and* suspense, fear *and* excitement, pleasure *and* pain," with the thriller rocking the viewer between the two. This is the genesis of his definition, which continues to grow as the examination proceeds. Instead of trying to delineate a precise definition, he provides parameters so as to create an understanding of the form without excluding "many works that, by common sense and common usage, belong within the wide domain of the thriller." This inclusive process works much better than an exclusive method, and is one of the strengths of this study.

He adds certain concepts from other critics to develop the ground rules of the thriller. These include the use of the exotic, the addition of adventure to the everyday world, and labyrinths, which appear in the forms of winding plots and physical spaces in which it is difficult to move. What becomes clear as one reads is that there is another element which must be in existence for a film to be a thriller for Rubin: this is a "vulnerable character drawn into a maze of danger and conspiracy." For this reason, the classic Universal horror films of the early 1930s do not qualify as thrillers, since their primary characters are mad scientists, monsters, and villains.

On the other hand, films by two very disparate people, Fritz Lang and Harold Lloyd, are given as examples from the Formative Period (up to the mid-1930s). Lang's choice of subject matter as well as his association with German Expressionist cinema of the 1920s naturally links him to the thriller: "The expressionist concern with transforming the ordinary world into a heightened realm charged with extreme states of feeling is applicable to the heightened, intensified, sensationalized world of the thriller." Lloyd, who called some of his movies "thrill pictures," believed in alternating laughs and screams from his audience, which is the emotional roller-coaster ride Rubin associates with the thriller.

The Classical Period (mid-1930s–1960), then, is dominated by the director who is unparalleled in his ability to combine the innocent character thrown into the labyrinth with the emotional seesaw, Alfred Hitchcock. As much as has been written about Hitchcock, Rubin's section still makes for interesting reading, since he does not stray from his topic. In discussing Hitchcock's early spy films, Rubin makes the connection between the thriller and the city: "The spy genre, by its very nature, centrally involves the key thriller theme of the intrusion of exotic and foreign elements into the familiar and domestic." His prime example is *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934), in which the climax takes place in London's Royal Albert Hall, conflating the public and private spheres.

The Classical Period contains many subsets of the thriller, and Rubin's movement from one to another flows smoothly. When he reaches film noir, he again makes the connection between the thriller and the city, seeing "the modern metropolis as a still glamorous and mythic place, where alluring decadence was about to fall into a sordid decay whose most suitable vehicle would be the police thriller." This makes for a fluid transition and helps to keep the book easily readable.

Moving into the Modern Period (1960-present), Rubin sees the beginning of this era as "marked primarily by reconceptions" of the central thriller genres. When the spy movie resurfaced in the 60s, it was in the form of the James Bond films. For Rubin, these break away from being thrillers and become more epic adventures because they have a "diminished sense of the familiar," and also because the hero is practically invulnerable. However, the movies he refers to as the anti-Bond films, those which show a grimmer, less heroic side of the spy business, are "closer to the central concerns of the thriller" not only because the main character is no longer indestructible, but because here the exotic and the everyday closely intermingle. It is also during this period that the police thriller displaced the Western as the primary thriller, that the modern horror film began its rise, and that "the neo-noir movement . . . helped to keep alive a more vulnerable, morally ambiguous concept of the thriller."

While Rubin covers nearly one hundred years of films in a cohesive fashion, he tears through the 1990s as if a stalker were after him. *Scream* (1996), arguably the most significant thriller of the decade, merits only a single sentence, which is a shame, as Rubin would seem to have some prescient remarks to make about the film. And a reader would hope for a glimpse of what directions the thriller may proceed in the future, but this is not to be found either. One other, less important problem is that the author occasionally goes over ground he has already covered elsewhere in the book.

Still, the final section of the book, a series of essays on particular films representing various subsets of the thriller, contains some very fine writing and analysis. The piece on Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* (1951) is one of the highlights of the book and professors would do well to share it with their students as an example of clear and cogent writing on the cinema. Make of it what you will, Rubin freely admits that his favorite thriller, the one that affected him most viscerally, is *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974). One cannot account for taste, but *Thrillers* does account for Rubin's talent as a film historian.

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The Transparency of Spectacle

Meditations on the Moving Image

By Wheeler Winston Dixon. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1998. $59.50 cloth; $19.95 paper.

This collection by Wheeler Dixon explores many prominent and important topics in film as the medium enters the next century. And by film, I mean a multitude of facets of the field: Dixon considers trends in international cinema, developments in digital technology and how they affect reception, the politics of independent film distribution, various aspects of horror film making and viewing, and in what seems to be his most original passion, heralding—if not altogether discovering—films and/or scripts by forgotten but fascinating filmmakers of the past. Throughout the book, Dixon writes in clear, concise prose, refreshingly avoiding the jargon and pretense that has marred some of the past broad theorizing about moving images.

You may find many of the chapters familiar, as Dixon borrows and revises from no less than 13 of his previously published articles to fashion the four chapters of this book, which is not to fault his implicit goal of creating a representative anthology, although it does result in some outdated claims. For instance, in discussing digital effects in cinema, as he did in a 1995 *Film Criticism* article, Dixon remains rather fixated on discussing his earlier examples such as *Forrest Gump* (1994), and while he goes on to speculate on the "forthcoming" Godzilla movie that would be released as his book was in press (which he had also done in his 1995 article), he could have offered a better analysis based on newer movies that he had actually seen. You also get the feeling that Dixon is straining to make connections between analyses that don't really gel together, and he often segues too casually between such disparate topics as Joseph Losey's *Accident* and the work of Black British filmmakers in the Sankofa collective—he simply notes that Sankofa's work was "in direct opposition to the work of empiricist Losey" (59), as if such a line adds focus to his scattered flow.

The acknowledgment section for some reason serves as his introduction to the very specific issues he addresses over the rest of the book, and here he makes it clear that "This overview of the corpus of the image/word spectacle in the late twentieth century is not designed to be comprehensive, being a highly personal examination of key texts, authors, and critics whose works command my attention in the waning days of the millennium" (xi). Still, as Dixon moves into the compelling themes of his first chapter, "The Reconfiguration of the Moving Image," in which he lists well the myriad ways in which cinema is currently changing, he seems to be in a bit of a rush, grabbing at a hodgepodge of examples as he argues about the supposed "death of the avant-garde feature film," and offering no examples for his otherwise prescient claim that "The [world-wide] web may indeed be the place where 1960s experimental cinema is re-invented, as it is cost effective, pervasive, and readily accessible" (9). Amid many other stimulating and often pithy comments in following chapters (such as how the evolution of the Internet parallels the evolution of cinema), Dixon will sometimes drop an abrupt literature review or filmography pertaining to a given topic, when such catalogs would be better placed in the end notes.

In the previously unpublished opening sections of the first chapter, Dixon speaks in his most eloquent and persuasive voice, which begs the question of why he did not expand further on these fresh ideas before derailing his train of thought into his past scholarship. Here Dixon sounds on the verge of a manifesto as he observes that "although we cannot possibly know every work, every text and every person, of every race and every nationality, in the history of moving image studies, this is nevertheless the task—the only task—we must set for ourselves" (22). The successive sections Dixon presents thus become his humble start at achieving this task, yet most of them lack the intrigue of his opening pages, and one wonders if the very discontinuity of his generally immiscible arguments suggests that Dixon's demands for the future study of a field that is expanding so dynamically and rapidly are unrealistic or simply self-defeating.

In examining a vast number of films over many genres and nationalities, Dixon does offer very adroit coverage of actual industry practice, providing interviews with notable (and curious) industry figures, and showing a deft knowledge of cultural trends equal to his wrestling skills with postmodernist theories. His coverage of Iranian films is quite appreciable, and he sheds further light on contemporary Middle Eastern and African cinema, yet again he forces together the incongruous elements of his different sections in such an awkward way that it reveals how often he is only scratching surfaces instead of conducting full excavations.

In the second chapter, Dixon fulfills the excavating potential he evinces early on, detailing the literary career of British colonial writer Edgar Wallace (of whom Dixon is an avid fan, despite the limited availability of Wallace's writings and the obscurity of almost all filmic adaptations of his work), and justifying his heavy concentration on Wallace's literary output by stating that "none of the films based on his works can be in any manner construed as faithful to his vision, for better or worse, and this fact in itself calls for a closer examination of the texts upon which these visual constructs are based" (89). He then moves on to the work of British brothers Edward and Harry Danzinger, whose New Elstree Studios in the late 50s and early 60s produced a number of largely forgotten "B" features. Here again Dixon demonstrates the excellent research skills that infused these sections as articles in popular culture journals.

The next chapter develops three perspectives on the horror film, the first of which presents a very erudite thesis on the heritage of bodily torture that recent horror films have lifted from the work of Edgar Allen Poe. Dixon then offers another archaeological find, the surprisingly feminist Reginald LeBorg, a lost director whose films are now equally lost, for reasons that Dixon explains: "Though LeBorg instinctively fought against the representational strategies of the feminine as employed and defined by Hollywood cinematic practice in the 1940s, in the end, the overwhelming power of the imagistic construct then favored by the studio

hierarchy ensured that his approach would, itself, be marginalized" (126). Of course, the question remains whether Dixon's thoughtful plot analyses will do enough to promote interest in this dismissed auteur, and Dixon seems painfully aware of the implausibility of instating LeBorg within the cinema canon. Another section on the feminist horror film is relatively unconvincing, as Dixon blurs genre distinctions by discussing slasher films and erotic thrillers in the same context, and offers few true insights on why women bring particular perspectives to these often problematic films that their male counterparts do not.

The final chapter includes an academic appreciation of the relatively famous hack maestro Roger Corman, in which Dixon confidently makes the claim that "while Corman had to make the most of many unfavorable situations, one would have to go back to Orson Welles to recall such an opportunity to speak with film" (160). Dixon then offers an entertaining account of the "heavy" persona in films which explores various notions of how the deviant evil wo/man has been portrayed, making a distinction between the "action heavy" and the "brain heavy" that is less revealing than his distinction between male and female heavies.

Dixon concludes the book with two short meditative sections, in which his informed outlook on motion pictures in the new millennium comes with mixed feelings. For instance, he sounds excited that "home viewers now have both the means and the distribution mechanism to create their own programming" (181), while he is also distraught at "the impoverishment, and also the suffocating opulence, of the American cinema" (182). Dixon even offers the ironic mantra of disenchanted audiences entering the digitized twenty-first century—"Since everything is possible, nothing is surprising" (183)—and closes with another call to action:

> For the choice is clear: we must create a communal spectacle in which all may participate, composed of images that speak to us personally, without mediation, images that we are required to interpret and reconstruct entirely for ourselves; or we become passive viewers at the service of a narcotizing series of images that seek to control and pacify our emotions, reducing our lives to an extension of the visions we see within the domain of the televisual, rather than apportioning the production of spectacle a small segment of our corporeal consciousness. (186)

Wheeler Dixon is not the first to declare this cultural conflict, and the means he offers to resolve it are not exactly sturdy nor complete, but he has provided for us a reflective, responsible initiative for dealing with our spectacular world.

Timothy Shary is a professor in the Screen Studies Program at Clark University.

BOOK NOTES

Contributors to Book Notes: **Leo Braudy** is a member of the *FQ* editorial board; **Leger Grindon** teaches Film Studies at Middlebury College; **Carl Plantinga** teaches at Calvin College; **Stephen Prince** is the Book Review Editor of *FQ*.

Gottesman, Ronald, ed. *Violence in America,* 3 vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1999. Ronald Gottesman casts a wide net in the more than 1900 pages of *Violence in America,* not to dredge some essence up from the depths but to approach the subject from as many sides as possible. In 595 entries from 444 contributors, that comes to quite a polygon. Physical violence of course takes up a large proportion of those entries, but Gottesman has also included such allied areas as the environmental violence of toxic spills, the psychic violence of hate speech and sexual harassment, and—most relevant for readers of *Film Quarterly*—a host of trenchant considerations of the fictions and representations of violence in visual art, literature, comics, theater, film, television, and video games. Along the way, he includes many subjects that are directly relevant to issues in film study, including entries dealing with such figures as Bonnie and Clyde, Billy the Kid, Wild Bill Hickok, and the Earp Brothers.

For the most part, the entries are succinct and well-informed, touching on a variety of significant issues without obviously exhausting them, and furnishing bibliographies for further exploration. In general, too, there's a nice tone of distance rather than detachment that allows the sensational side of violence its due without making it the whole story. The overviews by W.J.T. Mitchell, Charles Wolfe, and Nick Browne are only a few of the many excellent essays here.

My only mild caveat would be that, although the primary bent of this vast work is historical and sometimes even theoretical, there is a perhaps unavoidable but still definite tilt toward the most famous violences of the recent past. The beating of Rodney King doesn't have its own entry, but the 1992 Los Angeles riots do, as do Ted Bundy, O.J. Simpson, the Menendez brothers, and even Andrew Cunanan (the murder of Gianni Versace, in case you've forgotten). But this occasional presentness is a small price to pay for the many riches and insights of *Violence in America.* Most reference books codify preexisting ideas and information, but this one has created a field of vision.

Leo Braudy

Nolletti Jr., Arthur, ed. *The Films of Fred Zinnemann.* Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1999. $59.50 cloth; $19.95 paper. Over the course of his career Fred Zinnemann directed 22 feature films, won two Academy Awards for direction, received four citations from the New York Film Critics Circle and the D.W. Griffith Award for Lifetime Achievement. His credits include such classic films as *High Noon, From Here to Eternity* and *A Man For All Seasons.* Yet his work has received scant attention from film scholars. This new collection of 15 essays and an interview is a valuable addition to any film library and serves, along

hierarchy ensured that his approach would, itself, be marginalized" (126). Of course, the question remains whether Dixon's thoughtful plot analyses will do enough to promote interest in this dismissed auteur, and Dixon seems painfully aware of the implausibility of instating LeBorg within the cinema canon. Another section on the feminist horror film is relatively unconvincing, as Dixon blurs genre distinctions by discussing slasher films and erotic thrillers in the same context, and offers few true insights on why women bring particular perspectives to these often problematic films that their male counterparts do not.

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Gottesman, Ronald, ed. *Violence in America,* 3 vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1999. Ronald Gottesman casts a wide net in the more than 1900 pages of *Violence in America,* not to dredge some essence up from the depths but to approach the subject from as many sides as possible. In 595 entries from 444 contributors, that comes to quite a polygon. Physical violence of course takes up a large proportion of those entries, but Gottesman has also included such allied areas as the environmental violence of toxic spills, the psychic violence of hate speech and sexual harassment, and—most relevant for readers of *Film Quarterly*—a host of trenchant considerations of the fictions and representations of violence in visual art, literature, comics, theater, film, television, and video games. Along the way, he includes many subjects that are directly relevant to issues in film study, including entries dealing with such figures as Bonnie and Clyde, Billy the Kid, Wild Bill Hickok, and the Earp Brothers.

For the most part, the entries are succinct and well-informed, touching on a variety of significant issues without obviously exhausting them, and furnishing bibliographies for further exploration. In general, too, there's a nice tone of distance rather than detachment that allows the sensational side of violence its due without making it the whole story. The overviews by W.J.T. Mitchell, Charles Wolfe, and Nick Browne are only a few of the many excellent essays here.

My only mild caveat would be that, although the primary bent of this vast work is historical and sometimes even theoretical, there is a perhaps unavoidable but still definite tilt toward the most famous violences of the recent past. The beating of Rodney King doesn't have its own entry, but the 1992 Los Angeles riots do, as do Ted Bundy, O.J. Simpson, the Menendez brothers, and even Andrew Cunanan (the murder of Gianni Versace, in case you've forgotten). But this occasional presentness is a small price to pay for the many riches and insights of *Violence in America.* Most reference books codify preexisting ideas and information, but this one has created a field of vision.

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hierarchy ensured that his approach would, itself, be marginalized" (126). Of course, the question remains whether Dixon's thoughtful plot analyses will do enough to promote interest in this dismissed auteur, and Dixon seems painfully aware of the implausibility of instating LeBorg within the cinema canon. Another section on the feminist horror film is relatively unconvincing, as Dixon blurs genre distinctions by discussing slasher films and erotic thrillers in the same context, and offers few true insights on why women bring particular perspectives to these often problematic films that their male counterparts do not.

The final chapter includes an academic appreciation of the relatively famous hack maestro Roger Corman, in which Dixon confidently makes the claim that "while Corman had to make the most of many unfavorable situations, one would have to go back to Orson Welles to recall such an opportunity to speak with film" (160). Dixon then offers an entertaining account of the "heavy" persona in films which explores various notions of how the deviant evil wo/man has been portrayed, making a distinction between the "action heavy" and the "brain heavy" that is less revealing than his distinction between male and female heavies.

Dixon concludes the book with two short meditative sections, in which his informed outlook on motion pictures in the new millennium comes with mixed feelings. For instance, he sounds excited that "home viewers now have both the means and the distribution mechanism to create their own programming" (181), while he is also distraught at "the impoverishment, and also the suffocating opulence, of the American cinema" (182). Dixon even offers the ironic mantra of disenchanted audiences entering the digitized twenty-first century—"Since everything is possible, nothing is surprising" (183)—and closes with another call to action:

> For the choice is clear: we must create a communal spectacle in which all may participate, composed of images that speak to us personally, without mediation, images that we are required to interpret and reconstruct entirely for ourselves; or we become passive viewers at the service of a narcotizing series of images that seek to control and pacify our emotions, reducing our lives to an extension of the visions we see within the domain of the televisual, rather than apportioning the production of spectacle a small segment of our corporeal consciousness. (186)

Wheeler Dixon is not the first to declare this cultural conflict, and the means he offers to resolve it are not exactly sturdy nor complete, but he has provided for us a reflective, responsible initiative for dealing with our spectacular world.

Timothy Shary is a professor in the Screen Studies Program at Clark University.

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Stephen Prince

Letter

Dear Editor,

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Murphy confuses the complex history of the exhibition of *The War Game*, which was, so far as I know, banned from television anywhere in the world from its completion in 1965 until the mid-1980s, when the BBC allowed it to be broadcast in England and the United States. This change in policy may have been a response to the early publicity surrounding *The Journey*, which often mentioned the BBC's suppression of *The War Game* as the original instigation for the new film. It is true, as Murphy indicates, that *The War Game* was widely seen, but primarily in art theaters and on college campuses—that is, by a much more specialized audience than Watkins originally had in mind.

Murphy claims to have attended half of a 17-hour version of *The Journey*. In fact, the finished version of the film, as Rosenthal indicates, is 14 hours, though sometimes, during early screenings of the film, discussion time was built into the presentation. The length of each of the film's 19 sections is listed in the Canyon Cinema catalogue (415-626-2255; films@canyoncinema.com).

Rosenthal and Murphy do agree that *The Journey* is an "awful" film. Murphy inadvertently reveals one reason for their disappointment: "It was obvious that there was raw material for a tremendously powerful 90-minute anti-nuclear propaganda film. This would involve Watkins and/or a sympathetic cooperator in cutting 90 percent of the dreadful boring padding out of the full movie." Murphy, and perhaps Rosenthal as well, seem to assume that *The Journey* is meant either as propaganda or as a socially responsible entertainment.

The Journey is *not* a failed attempt at anti-nuke propaganda. It is an epic exercise in media deconstruction that uses the arms race as a focus. (*The Journey* could have centered on hunger, gender, race, and ethnicity—*all* issues it raises—just as well.) It provides a self-reflexive analysis of the mass media and, during its production and as a finished work, was/is an attempt to model new forms of mediation between various social groups in relation to real political issues. *The Journey* presents the results—*all* the results—of a remarkable experiment. Viewers with a serious interest in the relationship of media and society might usefully explore part or all of the data Watkins provides.

If it was socially responsible *entertainment* that Rosenthal and Murphy missed in Watkins' magnum opus, that is certainly available in *The Journey*. In my teaching I've found that Parts 1, 2, and 8 create a remarkable feature film experience.

The most fundamental mistake Rosenthal and Murphy make about *The Journey* is to assume that Watkins didn't know what he was doing when he made it (not what he was doing just to the "unsuspecting audience," as Rosenthal puts it, but also what he was doing *to them*). One would have thought that *The War Game*, *Culloden*, *Punishment Park*, and *Edvard Munch* might have earned Watkins more patience (and more self-examination) by these self-proclaimed admirers of his earlier work.

Scott MacDonald
New Hartford, N.Y.

Guidelines for Submissions

Film Quarterly is a long-established peer-review journal that invites the submission of articles, interviews, and reviews. The journal covers a wide range of topics, including history, theory, cultural analysis, national cinemas, documentary, television, and avant-garde and experimental film and video. Editorial decisions about acceptance for publication are made by the editor and the journal's editorial board at meetings held quarterly, in early February, May, August, and November (deadlines for submissions are one month before the meetings). Submit one hard copy of your manuscript; it should be computer-generated, double-spaced, and paginated. Disks and photos should not be included with the submission; they will be required only if your piece is accepted, and guidelines for disk formatting will be provided at that time. (However, it might help to know at this point that we prefer endnotes to footnotes and that film titles should be in italics.) Please include a SASE if you want your manuscript to be returned. More extensive guidelines can be requested from the Editor, *Film Quarterly*, UC Press, 2000 Center Street, Suite 303, Berkeley, CA 94704-1223; email: ann.martin@ucpress.ucop.edu Book reviews are assigned by the Book Review Editor. If you know of a book that you would like to review, or are generally interested in writing book reviews, please contact Stephen Prince at Virginia Tech, Dept. of Communication Studies, Blacksburg, VA 24061-0311; email: sprince@vt.edu *FQ* pays a nominal sum for published manuscripts—roughly $10.00/column (most articles are about 7,000 words, reviews and interviews usually somewhat shorter).

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Murphy claims to have attended half of a 17-hour version of *The Journey*. In fact, the finished version of the film, as Rosenthal indicates, is 14 hours, though sometimes, during early screenings of the film, discussion time was built into the presentation. The length of each of the film's 19 sections is listed in the Canyon Cinema catalogue (415-626-2255; films@canyoncinema.com).

Rosenthal and Murphy do agree that *The Journey* is an "awful" film. Murphy inadvertently reveals one reason for their disappointment: "It was obvious that there was raw material for a tremendously powerful 90-minute anti-nuclear propaganda film. This would involve Watkins and/or a sympathetic cooperator in cutting 90 percent of the dreadful boring padding out of the full movie." Murphy, and perhaps Rosenthal as well, seem to assume that *The Journey* is meant either as propaganda or as a socially responsible entertainment.

The Journey is *not* a failed attempt at anti-nuke propaganda. It is an epic exercise in media deconstruction that uses the arms race as a focus. (*The Journey* could have centered on hunger, gender, race, and ethnicity—*all* issues it raises—just as well.) It provides a self-reflexive analysis of the mass media and, during its production and as a finished work, was/is an attempt to model new forms of mediation between various social groups in relation to real political issues. *The Journey* presents the results—*all* the results—of a remarkable experiment. Viewers with a serious interest in the relationship of media and society might usefully explore part or all of the data Watkins provides.

If it was socially responsible *entertainment* that Rosenthal and Murphy missed in Watkins' magnum opus, that is certainly available in *The Journey*. In my teaching I've found that Parts 1, 2, and 8 create a remarkable feature film experience.

The most fundamental mistake Rosenthal and Murphy make about *The Journey* is to assume that Watkins didn't know what he was doing when he made it (not what he was doing just to the "unsuspecting audience," as Rosenthal puts it, but also what he was doing *to them*). One would have thought that *The War Game*, *Culloden*, *Punishment Park*, and *Edvard Munch* might have earned Watkins more patience (and more self-examination) by these self-proclaimed admirers of his earlier work.

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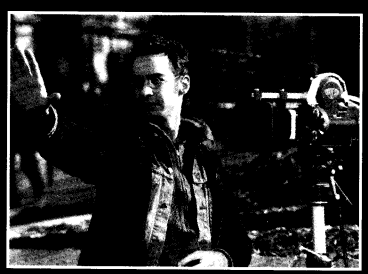

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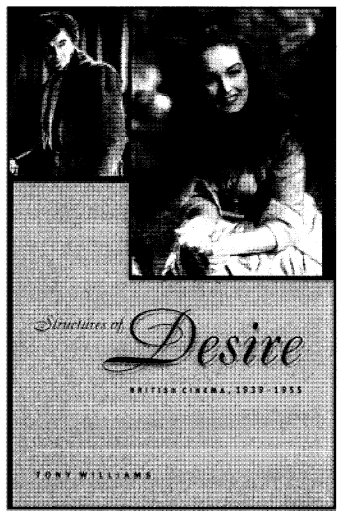

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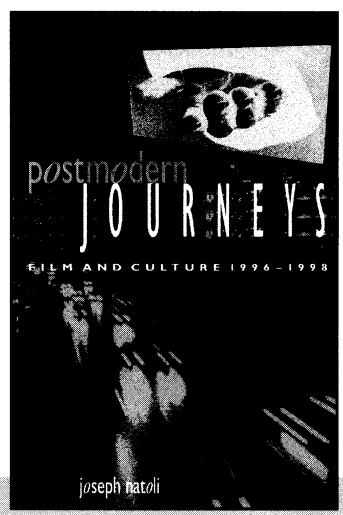

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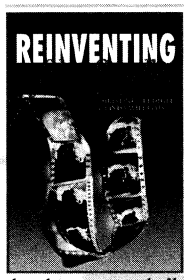

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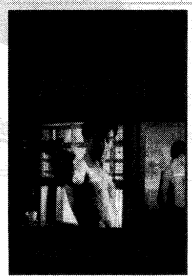

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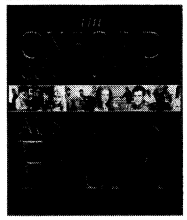

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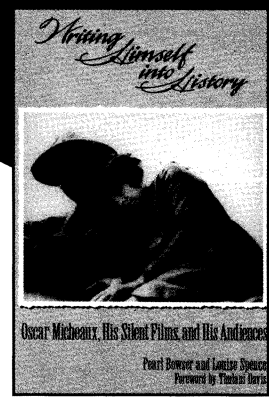

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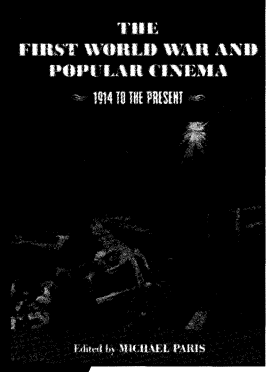

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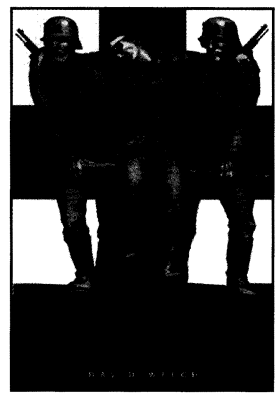

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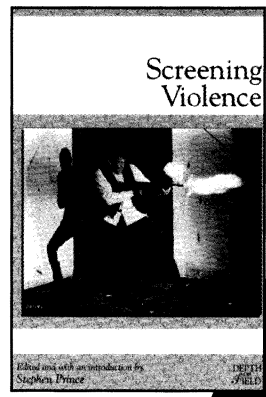

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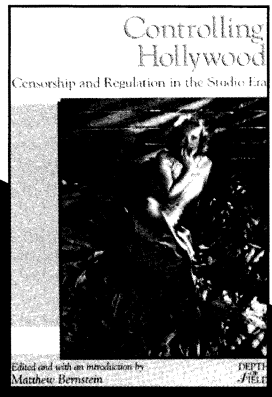

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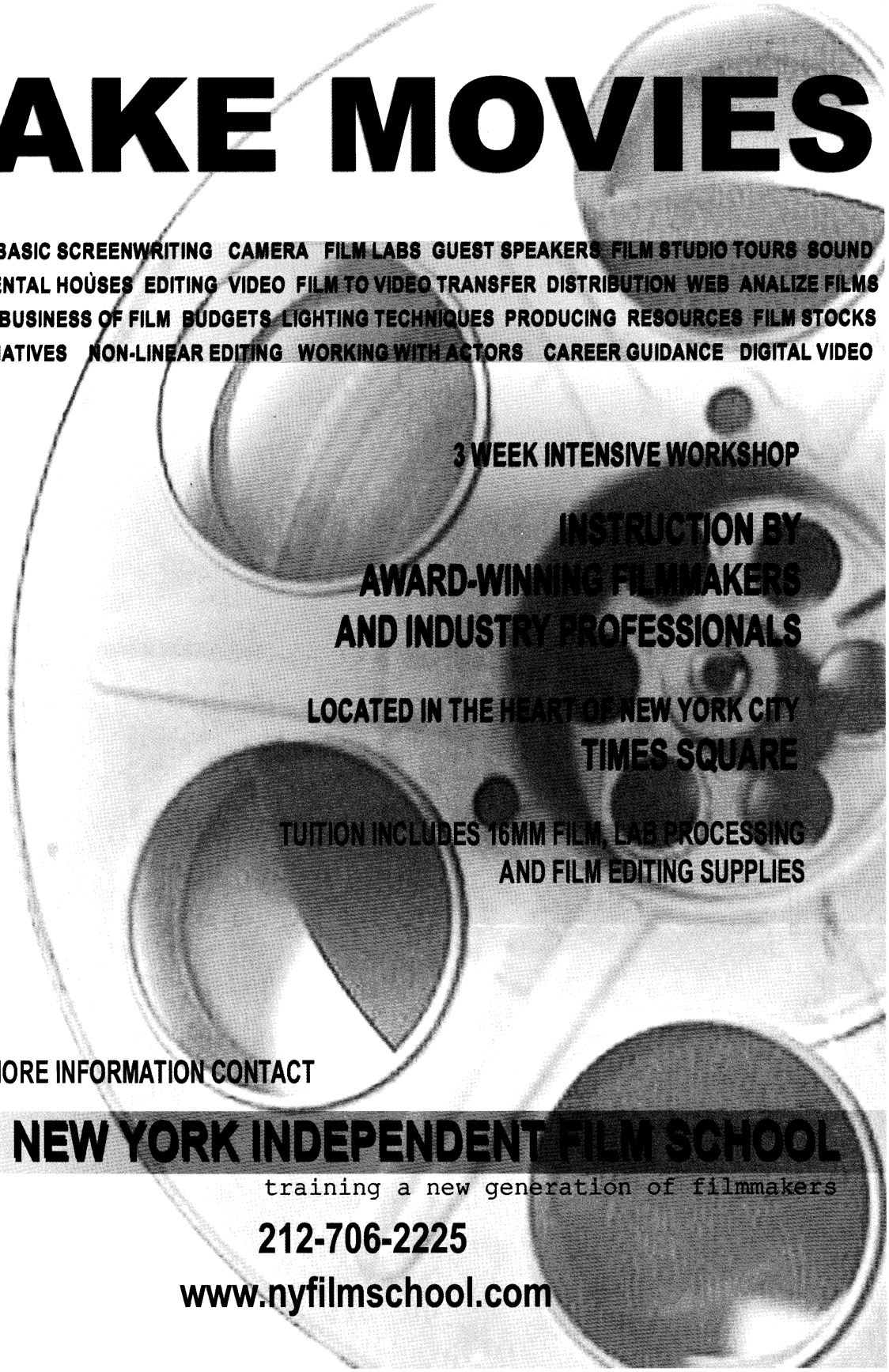

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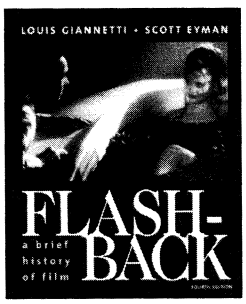

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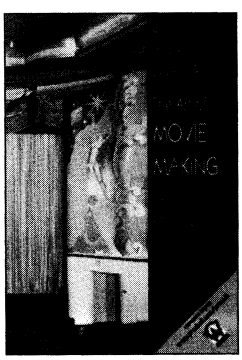

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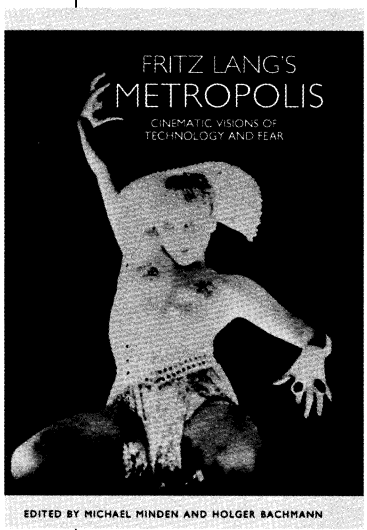

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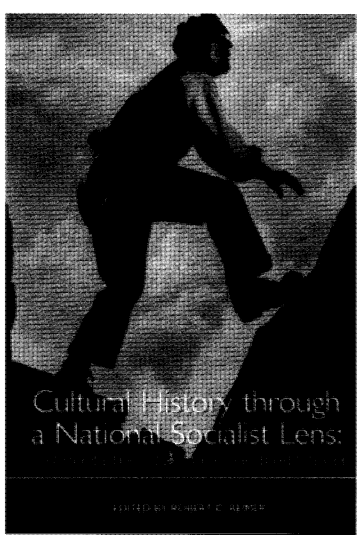

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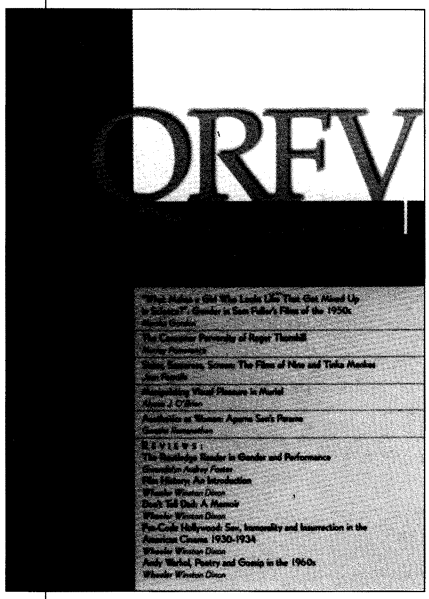

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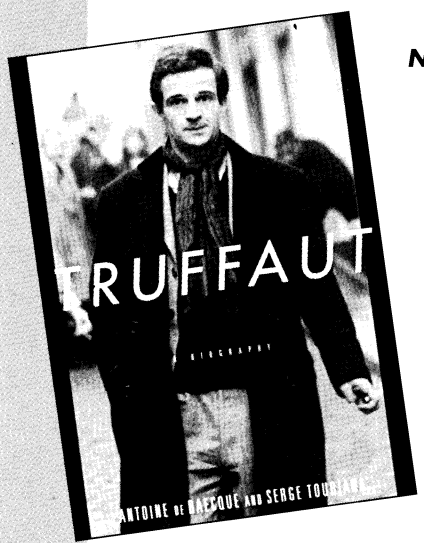

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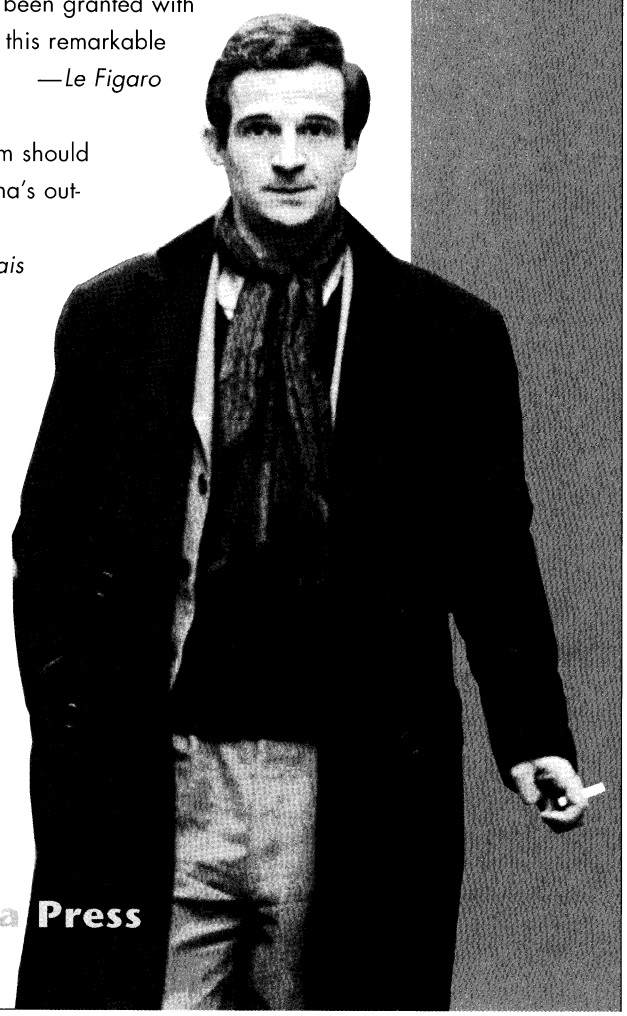

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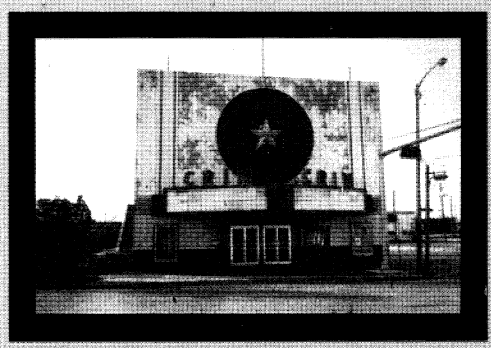

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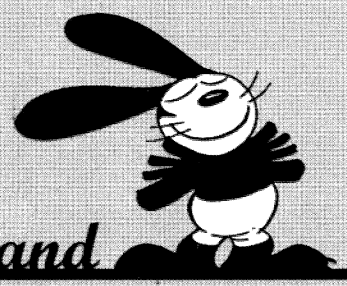

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